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# THE HARRISES



# THE HARRISES

BEING

AN EXTRACT FROM THE COMMONPLACE-BOOK OF  
ALEXANDER SMITH, THE ELDER

"We see the very wreck that we must suffer;  
And unavoided is the danger now,  
For suffering so the causes of our wreck."

—RICHARD II.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



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## **BOOK THIRD**



# THE HARRISES.

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## BOOK THIRD.

### CHAPTER I.

#### GATHERING UP OUR THREADS.

AGAIN we raise the drop-scene, to discover that three years have passed over our heads, producing even more than the usual effects of such a lapse of time on men and things. The second act in the great struggle in which England had been engaged for a quarter of a century is played out, and peace has returned to Europe. Wellington has marched victorious from Torres Vedras to Toulouse; and Napoleon, yielding to the world in arms, has descended from the throne of France, and become Emperor of Elba. In the dangers and

glories of the Peninsular campaigns, which contributed not a little to bring about these results, the cousins had borne their share ; and both had acquitted themselves like good soldiers. Both, also, had escaped, as if by miracle, unscathed ; and both had earned and obtained rapid promotion. When the army broke up on the banks of the Garonne, the one commanded a company of riflemen, the other a troop of horse ; and as they had often met, and shared each other's tent or bivouac when active operations were going on, so now they parted with mutual affection—Reginald moving with the infantry to the rear, that he might embark for England at Passages ; Charley marching through France, and taking his homeward passage, with the rest of the cavalry, from Calais. We shall see, by-and-by, how and where they encountered again.

Meanwhile, Lady Belmore, wearied of her predilection for Dissent—more, we are afraid, because it outraged her secular tastes than because she knew or cared anything about the

sin of schism—returned to her parish church, and for a while attended strictly and exclusively on Mr Cox's ministrations. These did not, indeed, fill up the measure of her yearnings ; they were too simple, too practical, too calm and intelligible for her. She could not help contrasting the quiet tone of the vicar's expositions with the fervid appeals to the imagination of his hearers in which Mr Jabez Growler used to indulge ; and, in spite of that shrinking from vulgarity which was innate in her, she sometimes doubted whether she had done wisely in ceasing to frequent the Bethel. If she could only find a minister who united in himself the qualities of a rousing preacher and a gentleman, she would go any distance to place herself under him, without stopping to inquire whether he had received the laying on of apostolic hands, or were self-appointed. She could not find such a person for a while ; and put up, therefore, with Mr Cox's moral essays. She did attain in due time to the summit of her religious wishes,

by what process shall be explained by-and-by.

Of Mr Thompson we have told the sad tale. He was never seen, he was scarcely heard of, in Baddlesmere any more. His rooms in Belmore House passed into the occupation of another librarian, and so remained, till the time came when Belmore House regained its dignity as the town residence of the Belmore family. As to Mr Fitzgerald, the journalist and man of fashion, time and events soon brought this truth to light, that in regarding himself as a man of mark, whom one party in the State courted and the other feared, he had fallen into just such a mistake as gentlemen of the press are apt to commit. His absence from St. Ann Street was wondered at by Mrs Todd, perhaps regretted, more than by any other living creature. For he was never in arrear with his rent; and made up for the irregular hours, which his business constrained him to keep, by the amount and regularity of his payments. For a day or two

also—we may go further and say, for a week or a fortnight—the editor of the ‘Messenger’ was a good deal put out for lack of his contributions. But even in 1812 the English press could boast of other able writers than Jaerden, Jock Campbell, Watts, Perry, Walter, Dr Stoddart, and Vesey Fitzgerald. These men might be in the front rank; but behind them were multitudes, less known, but quite as highly gifted as themselves, any one of whom was able and ready, at a moment’s notice, to fill up a void. Mr Fitzgerald’s place was in consequence supplied before three weeks were over; and nobody, either at the office of the ‘Messenger,’ or anywhere else, thought ever afterwards of asking what had become of him. What did become of him, however, we and our readers know better than the coroner’s jury knew, that sat upon the body when it was found. For found it was, at the end of a few days, by a shrimper, thrown high and dry upon a sandbank at the mouth of the river; and the verdict returned upon it was such as alone



the case admitted of—Found drowned. Poor wretch! the world took very little interest in his fate. A paragraph in the newspapers told of the “melancholy accident;” a column in the ‘*Messenger*’ sketched his career and eulogised his virtues and his talents. He was buried in the churchyard of St Bridget’s, Old Scratchum; and the few among his associates who went down to attend the funeral, asked no more about him than this: “What the devil could he be doing there?”

Mrs Todd’s drawing-room floor being in great request, was not long without another tenant. Of him our history takes no cognisance. But up-stairs, in his old apartment, now neatly furnished and well supplied, still dwelt M. de Couvré. Years were telling more and more continually upon the poor emigrant. His figure, once erect, began to shrink; his hair grew more lank and scanty on his head; and he tottered slightly in his walk; yet the habits of his life continued as little changed as the tone of his conversation. One idea still

engrossed his mind, and for one object he still continued to live. Night after night, so long as any of them were kept open, he repaired to the theatres ; and, in spite of constant disappointment, continued to hope on.

“I tell you, Madam Todd, that I shall find her yet. Those bad men did me one kind office. They put me in the way of accomplishing the single purpose for which I continue the search ; and it seems to me I shall not die till I have achieved it.”

“Well, Mr Discover, I’m sure I don’t object. If you choose to throw away your money in this way, and to starve yourself rather than give it up, that’s your concern—not mine. But this I do know, that there’s not a man or woman in London that won’t tell you as I do, that it’s all labour lost. For if you’ve been seventeen years looking for her, what chance can there be of finding her now ?”

“I tell you, Madam Todd, that I shall embrace her yet. I keep her dresses just as she left them, that she may find them fit to put on

when she comes back. Seventeen years ! Have I been seventeen years looking for her ? Let me see. Yes ; she was just seventeen years old and three months when the miniature was taken : and it is so like, that if my eye fall upon her for a moment, I shall know her again among ten thousand. No—no ; don't talk to me about giving it up. What have I to live for but to recover my darling ? ”

Mrs Todd did, however, talk to him day after day about giving it up, though all to no purpose. He held his own course ; and his funds at the Bank never failing, he did so without being put to greater inconvenience in his daily life than he chose voluntarily to inflict upon himself.

What was George Harris doing all this while ? He had won his seat. He had entered the House. The crisis in the fate of the administration was over before he took the oaths, and, acting on the advice of his friend the Duke of Preston, he assumed for a while a neutral attitude. A neutral attitude in the House of

Commons is, however, and always has been, at once embarrassing and profitless. Nobody cares for the views of an independent member. He is put down as crotchety, or self-conceited, or a fool, and there is the end of him. Now George had no ambition to end thus, so after a few months' experience of the ways of the House, he sought another interview with his Grace. The interview was granted at once, and he told his tale. The Duke smiled, looked gracious, and spoke with much unction.

"You see, Harris, there really is no pressing need of your vote now, and your coming over to us, when we don't want you, would do us no good, and might damage yourself. The Minister is pretty sure of a good majority on all important questions. My advice to you, therefore, is not to reject the advances of your own party—I beg pardon—the party to which your family belongs. It looks ill, you know, for a son to go against his father; unless, indeed, the constitution be in jeopardy, when, of course, all other claims must give way to those of the Common-

wealth. If, indeed, we were in any danger of a defeat, I should ask you to throw in your lot with us immediately: but there is no such danger. We are in power for ten years at least. It is not worth while, under such circumstances, to offend your father."

"My father has left me quite free to take my own line in politics, and my anxious desire is to prove to you that I value your good opinion above that of all other men. Indeed, I am in some degree pledged to Lady Alice to vote with your friends, and don't know how to face her if I either vote against you or remain any longer neutral."

"Don't you mind what Lady Alice says" (his Grace, in speaking of his daughter to George Harris, had never called her *Lady* Alice before), "she's a political enthusiast. She would have everybody vote for us if she had her own way, not considering that to the proper working of the constitution a good opposition is as necessary as a strong government. Lady Alice is one of those unthinking people that would be

glad to see the House of Commons abolished. She would have worked a banner for the Pretender, I verily believe, if she had been alive and old enough in the forty-five."

"Then you would rather that I voted with the Whigs?" asked George, somewhat dryly.

"No, not quite that: you put it too strongly. Of course I should be delighted to see you one of us, if your convictions go in that line. But under existing circumstances, knowing what your family politics are, and knowing also that we are strong enough to do without you, I should be sorry to recommend your taking a step which would put you in a false position both with your father and your constituents. You don't want a place, do you? you stand in no need of it, and we have a great many candidates for place among ourselves, and your coming over to us at this time would look as if you wished to stand in their way. You will come to the Duchess's party next Saturday, of course? She has friends on both sides of the House, you know, and so have I."

So saying, the Duke rose, and explaining to George that he had an appointment with the prime minister, shook hands with him, and wished him good morning. There was no invitation on the present occasion to go and see his friend Alice in the drawing-room. The Duke and he had met, by George's special desire, in his Grace's sanctum. They parted there without a hint being dropped that others besides his Grace would be glad to see the visitor. And yet this interview occurred within three months of the day when his Grace had been so urgent with his young friend to get into Parliament for the purpose of supporting the party of which his Grace was one of the main stays, and Lady Alice one of the indefatigable decoy-ducks. George was vexed, chagrined, disappointed. There had been a sort of struggle in his own mind, while passing from Harley Street to Dorset Square, between duty and inclination. He did not quite relish the idea of throwing his own protestations overboard, even though these had been to his constituents

of the vaguest and most general kind. And he was not quite sure, in spite of the tone of Lord Belmore's recent letters, whether a step so decided as his own conversion to Toryism might not offend his father. Yet it was a bitter disappointment to discover that the Tories, as represented by the Duke of Preston, were quite indifferent as to whether he became a convert or no. Was that all? Certainly not. The good or bad opinion of the Tories, as a party, was to him a matter of no moment whatever. He had hoped and expected to lay the Duke of Preston under a personal obligation, and with still greater earnestness to impress Lady Alice with the conviction that, for love of her, he was prepared to sacrifice even the political principles of his family. And now the Duke had told him that neither he nor Lady Alice cared a straw what his political principles were. For to this all that had been said in a round-about way amounted. Well, it was most mortifying; it was most vexatious. He had been outraged, in short,



and his pride rose against it. Go to the Duchess's party? No; he would do nothing of the sort. There was an amount of cool impertinence about the reception which had just been awarded him which he could not stomach. D—n them! he would take his own line, and make them all repent their folly—Lady Alice among the rest.

He did take his own line. He went down to the House that night still boiling with rage. Some trifling question arose between the Government and the Opposition on which a division was called for. Without caring what it was about, without at all understanding it, George obeyed the summons of the Whig whip, and went out into the lobby with a party which was soundly beaten. Mr George Harris, M.P., was thenceforth included in the list of Opposition members, and so remained ever after.

## CHAPTER II.

### PEACE.

NEVER had London been so mad with joy as in the summer and early autumn of 1814. All the crowned heads of Europe, all the generals and diplomatists who had played foremost parts in the great war, flocked thither to congratulate the Prince Regent of England and themselves on its successful termination. Reviews, naval battles in miniature on the canal in St James's Park, Chinese bridges there, illuminations everywhere, fireworks, bands of music, kept the people delighted from morning till night, and from night till morning; and from morning till night crowds thronged the streets, the squares,

the parks, the river, as if their sole business in life had been to rejoice. As to great dinners, great balls, great concerts, operas, and theatrical performances, to these there was no end. A rich harvest reaped the keepers of hotels and lodging-houses, to which, from far and near, eager sight-seers flocked. It was a season never to be forgotten by those who lived through it ; yet, after all, it was not in London, but elsewhere, in remote villages and country houses, that true gladness of heart prevailed—the quiet joy which is too deep for words, which any public display would outrage, which finds vent in tears. There wives received their husbands into their arms, fathers their sons, sisters their brothers, and, sweeter perhaps than all, the betrothed ones hung upon the necks of their heroes, safe from sword and bullet, dearer a thousand times than ever because crowned with laurels. How the arrival of the coach in every country town was longed for and watched ! How eagerly sisters crushed up into the inn yard, each

striving to be the first to receive her brother's embrace! How furtive and anxious were the glances shot by bright eyes over blinds or through jalousies at the loved one as he passed the door, the beating heart scarce controlled by the reflection that her turn would come next after fathers and mothers, and come soon! High and low, rich and poor, scarce knew how to contain themselves. The martial music, which only a few months before had told of partings, possibly for ever, now came up on every breeze, as regiment after regiment marched through towns and hamlets towards their appointed quarters, like the chorus of angels. Verily the summer of 1814 was the brightest and proudest that ever shone upon old England, the bereaved themselves trying to forget their own sorrow in order that they might not throw a damp over the happiness of their neighbours.

Of the two cousins, Charley Harris was the first to plant foot upon English ground. A

pleasant march through France brought his regiment to Calais, whence a fair breeze wafted it in five hours to Dover, and upon the self-same pier whence, four years previously, they had taken their departure, the — Light Dragoons formed up amid the enthusiastic cheering of their countrymen. To move to Canterbury, to fit men and horses into their proper places, to settle the internal economy of the different troops, occupied a day or two, and then the leaves and furloughs came out. Charley, being one of those who had served continuously with their standards, got his *congé* at once, and, with a mind full of such thoughts as under like circumstances take possession of the young, he made short work of packing his portmanteau, and shorter still of securing a place on the London coach. But the great city presented no attractions to him. The swelling downs at Baddlesmere, the waving woods, the stream with its pools and its lashers, his mother's image, and—let us do him justice—a sweet remembrance of Lucy

just as she was when they parted—these things engrossed him quite. He had no room in his imagination for aught else, unless it were an occasional thought, more sad than cheering, of his father. It was an irksome evening that which he spent alone in the Golden Cross. It never occurred to him to seek out his brother, of whom, by the way, he had heard, during the last three years, only through his letters from Baddlesmere. But he got through it, partly by a young soldier's ordinary shift in those days—half-price at the nearest theatre—partly by getting to bed and trying to sleep as soon as the performance was over. Next morning early saw him on the box-seat of the Winchester coach, and, punctual to its time, the vehicle brought him to the Park gate opening on the common. There it stopped to set him down; and there—yes! there stood the well-known carriage, and there beside it his mother, waiting to receive him as mothers only receive their sons after long and anxious absence. We draw a veil over all that fol-

lowed. Not for many a day had Lady Belmore wept tears so comforting as those which she shed on the neck of her favourite son. Never had the son loved his mother so tenderly as when he kissed them off, being all the while unable to restrain his own.

It was a very happy day that at Baddlesmere Court. His lordship, though he declined going out with his lady to meet the young soldier at the Park gate, stood outside the hall door, and took the young man into his arms as he sprang from the carriage. Great, also, was the rejoicing in the servants' hall, and loud and merrily rang the village bells in honour of young master's safe return. Our readers will of course understand that over the avenue at intervals triumphal arches had been thrown, and that tenantry and work-people were gathered in knots here and there to cheer as the carriage passed. They will understand, also, that beef and beer were liberally dispensed in hall and barn, and that, as darkness set in,

tar-barrels and piles of brushwood blazed bright on every hill, telling the districts round about how proud the retainers of the house of Belmore were of their hero, how mad with joy at his safe return. Nor among those whose hearts were made glad may we omit to notice the inmates of the vicarage. Lucy, to be sure, was nervous, and said little ; indeed, she kept herself as much as possible aloof from the rest. But even in Lucy's bosom the uppermost feeling was joy, though she had learned long ere this to consider the vows uttered by her hero in their parting hour as cancelled. Well, so it always has been, and doubtless will be, human nature continuing as it is. The loves of early youth are very beautiful. They rarely survive, except in novels, the testing processes of separation and time. Lucy and Charley met, not that day, but next morning, rather wondering, perhaps, how they should mutually regard each other, than bent on resuscitating dormant feelings. They parted



excellent friends, yet both equally satisfied that the dream of other days was ended, and could never come again.

Baddlesmere was a dull place, a very dull place, for a youth of two-and-twenty, fresh from the camp, the march, the leaguer, and the battle. Charley found his father's settled gloom scarcely more intolerable than his mother's religious lectures, and of the small-talk at the vicarage, whether it took a lively or a sentimental turn, he soon grew weary. Most of his comrades who, like himself, had taken their leaves, were in the full swing of the London gaieties, and the descriptions which they sent him of what they were themselves seeing and doing soon awakened the desire to go and see and do likewise. He had been scarcely a week at home ere he suggested to his loving parents that it would be necessary for him to go to town. There were honest expressions of regret on his father's part, for though he never shared his son's sports nor claimed much of his company, Lord

Belmore loved Charles as much as he was capable of loving any living thing. Lady Belmore was certainly not less mortified than her husband, though she took a different mode of making her regrets known. She must bear her cross ; it was the Lord's will ; this world was a miserable world—she had learned to look beyond it. But Charley's mind was made up, and after a hasty parting with his friends over the way, he put the Winchester coach once more into requisition, and betook himself to London, where for the present we must leave him. Whither shall we turn our eyes next ? In a direction which as yet is new to them. And because the objects that attract their gaze are strange also, it will be necessary to say a few words about them.

## CHAPTER III.

### CHILDHOOD.

A LOVELIER vale than that through which the Tamar rolls his waters is not to be found even in lovely Devonshire. To be seen aright, it must be visited not later than the middle of May, while yet the foliage is in its freshest glory, and the blossom lingers on the apple-tree. And among the objects, all of them noteworthy, which attract the notice of the voyager upon that pellucid stream, there is none, in its own way, more exquisitely beautiful than the hamlet, church, and rectory of St Botolph's. There they stand—the old Norman church with its grand square tower, midway up the ascent of the hill; the rectory, separated

from the church only by the road ; and some half-dozen white cottages that go to form the hamlet, embowered, each separately, in the richest foliage, and all—hamlet, rectory, and church—now hidden, now seen partially at intervals from amid the screen of wood. A few meadows, interposing here and there with an orchard or two, and some patches of green corn, relieve what might otherwise be mistaken for a mere forest scene ; and a good road, well defined, running along the margin of the river, turns up the face of the hill into the hamlet, and is there lost amid the foliage.

Under the shadow of a catalpa tree, on a lawn soft as velvet, which slopes down towards the river, and commands a full view of one of its broadest reaches, three ladies are seated on three pleasant rush-made garden chairs on a bright day verging towards the beginning of June. One, an elderly person, knits—a placid occupation, which seems to be in harmony with her nature, for her speech is slow, her voice quiet in its tones, and her general manner

calm and matronly. The others have books in their hands, to which, however, neither of them appears to pay much attention. The elder of the two is a tall handsome girl, apparently about twenty years of age, or perhaps a year older. Her complexion is fair, her features good, her eyes dark-blue, and her hair abundant and of a dark-chestnut colour. The younger, below rather than above the ordinary stature of women, looks like a being of a different order. She cannot be more than seventeen years of age at the most, yet her form is perfect symmetry ; eyes large, dark, and lustrous, look out from beneath brows exquisitely cut and tinted, and a complexion pale, except when exercise or excitement calls the blood into the cheek, gives her an appearance of delicacy which is not real. As to her features, they are such as we see only in the most perfect specimens of Greek art ; while her hair, of that rich blue-black which is as rarely met with in England as it is glorious, hangs in natural curls on each side of her noble forehead

in front, while behind it is gathered up, according to the hideous fashion of the day, into a knot. As we have just said, this little group is seated under the shade of a catalpa tree, close to one another, on a beautiful day in May, all of them engrossed with thoughts which appear to have little or no connection with the occupations in which they are severally engaged.

“He’ll surely come to-day, mamma,” exclaimed the elder of the two girls, closing her book and flinging it at a fourth garden-chair, which, however, it failed to reach. “This is the third time papa has gone to meet him, and you know he told us that the ship was under orders for Plymouth.”

“Very true, my dear, and I hope he will come. Three, you know, is a lucky number ; but I don’t think the ‘Lady of the Lake’ will be improved by lying open on the grass. I daresay you’ve broken her back, poor thing !”

“Oh, mamma, how can you think of the ‘Lady of the Lake’ and what becomes of her

when we are dying to get back Regy ! Do you think he will come to-day ? ”

“ I hope so, my dear ; I hoped so yesterday and the day before. I shall be very much disappointed if he don’t.”

“ Disappointed, mamma ! I don’t think I can survive another day of suspense.”

“ Oh yes you can, my love. It takes a great deal of suspense to kill ; though I agree with you that hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”

“ And there sits Madaline,” went on the impetuous girl, “ as cool and indifferent as if Regy had been absent from us not more than a week. I declare it makes me wild to see you both.”

Madaline, as the other maiden was called, looked up at the speaker, and an arch smile passed over her beautiful countenance. She was evidently amused at the determination of her companion to engross the merit, such as it was, of intense anxiety to welcome back the wanderer. She contented herself, however,

with giving utterance to some commonplace remark, which we may as well leave unnoticed, while we throw a little more light upon the circumstances which produced it than the progress of our history has yet done.

The three ladies gathered on the lawn in front of St Botolph's Rectory belonged to the Rector. The elder of the three was his wife. He had married her some five-and-twenty years previously to the incidents which we are now recording, and never found reason to repent having done so. The Honble. and Reverend Sydney Harris was a young man when he thus settled in life. He never professed to have entertained for the lady of his choice any passionate or warm devotion. If anything of the sort existed between them, it must have been on her side, though it might be hard to conceive how a woman so habitually placid could either love or hate with intensity. But whatever the attraction might be which brought them together, it proved to be a lasting one. They were, or to the outer



world seemed to be, quite satisfied with each other. They certainly accomplished their silver wedding with as few differences as usually occur between man and wife in the quarter of a century which goes to make it up.

The Honble. and Rev. Sydney Harris had travelled a good deal in his youth. He was, in fact, the younger brother of the present Lord Belmore, with whom, under the care of the Rev. Thomas Brackenbury, he made the tour of Europe ; and with whom also, as has been stated elsewhere, he returned somewhat abruptly to be told by his father that, whether he liked the profession or not, he was expected to take holy orders. He took orders accordingly, was inducted as soon as he attained the proper age into the valuable rectory of St Botolph's, and did his duty there for a while somewhat carelessly, yet never so as to bring discredit on his cloth. Nature, perhaps, had scarcely fitted him for a calling so responsible, and there was upon him for a year or two a settled gloom, which his neighbours attributed

to impatience under the restraint to which, even towards the end of the last century, thoughtful men felt to be inseparable from the office of a clergyman. But by degrees he became reconciled to the inevitable, and finding in the neighbourhood an amiable and lady-like young woman, well connected, and possessed of a handsome independence, he proposed to her, was accepted, and brought her home to the parsonage. The fruits of this marriage were, first, a son—a fine healthy boy—who, after receiving a good preliminary education, was entered at Marlow, and passed out of the Military College into a rifle regiment; and next, the fair girl whose impatience to welcome back her brother from the wars we have taken occasion to notice. Who then was that other maiden, the beautiful vision of whom mention has been made as completing the garden group? Nobody could tell. All that was known in the parish and neighbourhood respecting her was, that about seventeen years prior to the date at which we have now arrived,

the Honble. and Rev. Sydney Harris received an urgent summons from home ; that he departed the same day within an hour of the arrival of the post, and that he was absent about a fortnight ; that at the end of that time he returned in a post-chaise, bringing with him an infant and a nurse ; that the nurse, having handed over her charge to Mrs Harris, was taken into the dining-room, and there fed and otherwise refreshed, while the horses were resting ; and that, immediately on the accomplishment of the latter object, she was, by Mr Harris himself, handed into the chaise, and drove off without having had the opportunity of exchanging a single word with any of the domestics.

That the arrival of this infant did not take Mrs Harris at least by surprise the preparations which were made for its reception sufficiently proved. Her own little ones had outgrown the cradle and the crib, and as there seemed to be no expectation of legitimate successors to these treasures, both had been put

away for some time. But both, during Mr Harris's absence, were brought to light again and refurbished; while a healthy young woman was sought for and found, whom a very moderate wage induced to transfer her own infant to a neighbour's care, and to come into the Rector's family in the capacity of wet-nurse. To her the new arrival was made over, and they took to each other charmingly. Baby was pronounced by nurse to be the sweetest little angel that eye ever rested on; and nurse had undoubtedly the satisfaction to find that her little charge clung to her as to a mother, and crowed and smiled at her long before she had learned to evince any other marks of a growing intelligence.

An incident of this sort, especially if it occur in a retired country neighbourhood, never fails to set the tongues of gossips wagging. Conjecture was busy as to who the little stranger could be; what the connection was between her and the Rector; why he did not let his neighbours know that he was about to add in

this fashion to his family ; and whether or no there was any real ground for mystery. For a mystery both the Rector and his wife made of the whole matter. They volunteered no information ; they evaded inquiry so long as it was possible to get away from it by evasion ; and when questions were put, as happened occasionally to be the case, a little too broadly, they answered as suited their own purpose. The child was an orphan. She was the daughter of a very dear friend of the Rector, who had committed her to his charge when dying. The Rector and his wife had adopted her, and meant to rear her as if she were their own child. And so they did. They gave her their own name ; they watched over her infancy with the tenderest care ; they placed her, as her faculties dawned, under the same governess by whom the other children were taught ; and by-and-by, when her powers of comprehension enlarged themselves, Mr Harris became to her, as he was to the other two, her tutor on subjects beyond the compass of an ordinary

governess. And well she repaid the kindness. To teach little Madaline was not only no labour—it was a positive delight. She took in, as if by intuition, every statement or explanation that was made to her. Though younger than Emily by three years at least, she soon caught her up ; indeed Reginald himself, her senior by five years, scarcely, when he departed at the age of thirteen to put on the uniform of a cadet, could say that on more than one subject he was ahead of her. Nor was her disposition less admirable than her ability. Proud she was, and apt at times to take offence ; on which occasions that large dark eye of hers seemed to emit flashes of fire. But the fit, as it came rarely, so it soon passed away ; and then nature resumed her empire—a nature so loving, so unselfish, so true, so merry, that all hearts were won to her.

The three children grew together as brother and sisters. The youngest of the three seemed ignorant, indeed, that the tie of brotherhood was not between them ; and the other two,

with the indifference to such matters which is inherent in children—for to speak of delicacy would be absurd—acted towards her in all things as the elders of a family are wont to do towards the juniors. Thus matters went on till Madaline had reached her sixth year, when a circumstance occurred which wrought a wondrous change in the child's moral being. It happened one day that Mrs Harris, passing the day-nursery or play-room—which the children were in the habit of using when the weather was too boisterous to admit of their taking exercise out of doors—heard the sound of sharp bickering, to which she considered it right at once to put a stop. She opened the door, and was shocked to find little Madaline in a passion of tears, and Reginald scowling on his sister Emily as if he could have felled her to the ground.

“Children, children! what does all this mean? what have you been doing? which of you is to blame?”

“Why, Emily, to be sure, mamma,” answered

Reginald, throwing up his head. "She's a selfish little wretch, and I could kill her."

"No such thing, mamma!" cried Emily. "I'm not selfish; I only wanted Regy's pencil, because it's softer than mine, and Madaline wouldn't give it up."

"Mamma," interposed little Madaline, looking up through her tears, with a gaze so sad and desolate that it went to Mrs Harris's heart, "are you not my mamma? is not papa my papa, and Reginald my brother?"

"My darling, my darling!" replied Mrs Harris, trying to smile, but scarcely achieving her purpose, "why do you ask such a very silly question?"

"Because Emily says that I am not one of you—that I have no right to her brother's pencil, because he is not my brother, nor you my mamma, nor papa my papa."

"Emily, my love, how could you so hurt the feelings of that child? how could you be so cruel?"

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed the little one thus



addressed, bursting, in her turn, into tears, "I didn't mean to be cruel—I didn't mean to hurt Madaline's feelings; I only spoke because I was in a passion, and I'm very, very sorry."

"But are you not my mamma?" persisted the little orphan. "Must I not call you mamma any more, nor love you and papa? And Reginald and Emily, are they not my brother and sister? Oh, mamma, mamma, what am I? where are my own mamma and papa?"

"My darling, my love!" replied Mrs Harris, taking the child into her arms, and kissing away her tears, "never mind the silly words that an angry sister speaks. I am your mamma—your own mamma; and papa is your papa; and you are our dear little Madaline, whom we love very tenderly, and always will love, while she is the good, loving child she is now. Emily," she continued, "I am shocked at your want of delicacy. You see how you have wounded the poor child. Come and ask her to forgive you, and be friends again and sisters." The command was

immediately obeyed. The repentant culprit took Madaline out of her mother's arms into her own, kissed and wept over her ample tears ; indeed, for a few moments, the only sound audible in that play-room was that of wailing. But happily the sorrows of childhood do not last long. A few kind words from Mrs Harris put a stop to this lamentation ; a parting caution not to fall out again was received with many promises of better behaviour, and the cloud, to all appearance, cleared away. Did it clear away in reality ? From the brows and the memories of two out of the three children—yes. From the memory of the third ?—no, never. She could not get out of her mind what her sister had said. She was too acute to fail of noticing that her own question to mamma was rather evaded than answered. From that hour a shade of melancholy darkened down upon her existence, which not all the love that was lavished upon her sufficed to disperse. Perpetually the short ill-natured saying of Emily rose up to disturb her.

“You have no right to anything of Reginald’s. He is not your brother—he is mine. My mamma is not your mamma, nor my papa your papa neither.” Who then was she? Had she no papa? no mamma? no brother? no sister? Surely she must have, and surely mamma would tell her where to find them. Often, when the rest of the family knew nothing about it, she would come and lay her head in Mrs Harris’s lap, and weep and sob, and look up and say, “No, you are not my mamma, and yet I love you—oh! so much! But do tell me who my real mamma is? I know I shall love her too, though not so much as I love you.”

“My darling,” was the constant reply on such occasions, “why should you distress yourself and me for no purpose? If I am not your own mamma by blood, I am in love and affection; and you know how papa loves you too, and Regy and Emily. Pray, pray, try to forget that foolish taunt of Emily’s when she was

naughty. It quite wounds me to think that a trifle so worthless should have disturbed you one moment after it happened."

"Well, mamma, I will try to forget what Emily said. But when I am older, will you not tell me who I am?"

"When you are older, my love, you won't care to pry into any matters which papa and mamma think it best to say nothing about."

Madaline assented to the proposition. She could hardly do otherwise. Did the prediction work out its own accomplishment? By no means. The older she grew the more intense was her desire to have explained to her a mystery which haunted her continually. She said no more to Mrs Harris on the subject, except at very remote intervals; but the subject was rarely absent from her mind. The consequence was, that insensibly her manner became more subdued, perhaps reserved, than was natural to it. She continued still to be what she had ever been, loving, unselfish, true;

but the mirth that originally wove itself through these qualities, and gave to them a charm peculiarly its own, came to her in rarer fits. She knew that she was alone in the world, and the idea lay like a heavy burthen on her soul.

## CHAPTER IV.

### EXPECTATIONS.

MADALINE was eight years old, Emily eleven, when Reginald left them for the first time to begin his studies at Marlow. Even thus early the girls exhibited marked contrariety of temperament by the way in which they took the separation. Emily was boisterous in her grief, and for a whole day was inconsolable. Madaline looked very sad when she gave her foster-brother the parting kiss, and went away into a secluded corner and wept bitterly. She came back, however, in a few minutes to the family circle, more quiet than she usually was, yet having left upon her cheek not the faintest trace of tears. It seemed, indeed, to be her

great desire to soothe the other mourners, and by a thousand little attentions and kindnesses to cheat them out of their griefs. But when night came, and the two girls retired to their chamber, the elder got to bed as fast as possible, and fell asleep at once; the younger never closed an eye for hours, and moistened her pillow. And so it was at each parting; just as on every occasion of the cadet's return, Emily rushed to meet him, as if her life had been wrapt up in his, while gentle Madaline stood apart, looking at him wistfully, and waiting till he came forward, which he was never slow in doing, to give her a brother's embrace. And, let the truth be told, almost from the hour when the little helpless orphan arrived at the Rectory, Reginald's affections wound themselves round her with a tenderness which he did not feel when thinking of his sister. He loved Emily very much, in spite of the frequent tiffs that were between them, for they were both somewhat exacting and not a little imperious. But Madaline put in exactly that

claim upon his affections which manly boys never can resist. She never contradicted him, she never bandied hard words with him. If she did not like anything which he proposed, she would raise objections to it. But if her objections failed to convince his reason, she invariably gave way. To her, indeed, he soon became a sort of protector. She was never so happy as when he laid her under some little obligation, by helping her either in some difficulty in her lessons, or out of doors at their play; and she let him know this, not ostentatiously or of set purpose, but by that nameless something in her manner which he understood, though it might have puzzled him to explain, and which was certainly not noticed by anybody else. Thus, though naturally timid, she would go with him in the boat often when Emily point-blank refused, and was more than repaid for any suffering she might have gone through when he called her a brick, or a trump, or a brave girl. It was a very beautiful tie that which linked these children to-



gether, the brotherly love on which it was engrafted being, though they themselves were certainly not alive to the fact, sublimed—if we may use the expression—by the consciousness that there was in truth no tie of brotherhood between them.

Reginald got his commission in due time, and had his appointments supplied, according to the approved regimental pattern, by the well-known house of Taitham in St James' Street. His uniforms were made in Plymouth by a first-rate artist, who had formerly been master-tailor to the corps of which Regy was now a member. How noble he looked in his dark-green attire, his green plume, his steel-mounted sabre, silver whistle and chain, his black belts and cartouch-box. Father, mother, sister shouted their applause as he marched to and fro upon the gravel walk that they might admire him ; and well worthy of admiration he was. For his frame, though slight, was tall and well put together ; his fair hair waved in the wind as it escaped from beneath his

shako, and his fine, open, ingenuous countenance beamed with delight, even while the flush, half of shame, half of excitement, mantled on his cheek. Why was it that Madaline's voice could not be heard in that chorus of applause? Who shall say? She was still but a child barely eleven years old. Yet either because the warm blood of a clime nearer to the sun than that of England coursed through her veins, or for some other constitutional reason, she was already, so far as feeling and sentiment were concerned, more of a woman than Emily. Perhaps in the gauds which the rest admired, she saw only tokens of a speedy severance—the badges of a profession which of necessity must render the wearer henceforth more than ever an alien from his home. Perhaps an active imagination carried forward her thoughts to scenes of carnage from which her hero, for such he had come to be, might not escape with life. Perhaps a deeper admiration than any of them experienced—that sort of reverence which all true women pay to valour—

kept her silent ; or possibly the thought that, now he was a man, he would cease to think of his little playmate as he used to do, exercised a restraining influence over her. Whether any or all of these causes put together operated to move her, we need not stop to inquire ; but the effect was this, that she fell slightly behind the delighted trio, and gazed in silence on the happy boy, through a mist of tears, which, however, she restrained from falling, though not without an effort.

There was great joy and gladness in the Rectory during the month which the Horse Guards allowed for the young soldier to fit himself out, and take his leave of home. Gatherings of friends were frequent there and elsewhere, and in the dance with which the evening invariably closed, what partner among the youths present was so much sought after by happy maidens as the rifleman ? But the day of parting came, and with it agony unutterable. At last the cord, which for so many years had bound up in one five loving hearts, must

be strained in earnest, if not broken. At last the bird, the favourite in the nest, must take his flight ; and when he should return, if ever, who could tell ? But why linger over these things ? They have been since the world began, they will be while it lasts ; and bitter though the grief of a first serious parting may be, it is not the keenest nor the most enduring to which poor humanity is subject. Reginald mounted the box-seat of the coach, trying to look brave, but very partially succeeding. The servants who had been about the house since he was born, clustered out to get the last look of him. His father, his mother, and Emily stood weeping by the garden-gate. He saw them all, and waved his hand to them. But his eye wandered up to a window near the roof of the house, looking for that which it failed to see. No, no ; poor little Madaline had fairly given way at last. Her heart was too full, her agony too intense, to endure that any eye except one should observe

them. She lay upon her face on the bed, and wished that she could die.

How Reginald conquered his griefs, and what subsequently became of him, our readers are aware. With those whom he had left behind sorrow was more enduring. But Time, the surest of all comforters, wrought his accustomed work upon them; their eyes grew bright again by degrees, and the everyday duties of life commanded their attention. The girls were getting in many things beyond the range of their governess's acquirements. Masters, in arts which she undertook to teach only rudimentally, must be procured, and it was well for the family at St Botolphs that Plymouth could supply them. England still afforded shelter to numerous exiles from their homes on the Continent, among whom the common resource was to become teachers, not of languages only, but of music and drawing also. The aid of three of these gentlemen was called in, and the pupils profited, each in her own way, by their labours. But their ways

were very different. Emily made fair progress, especially in drawing. Madaline more than equalled her there, and in languages and music left her immeasurably behind. For the former she soon showed that she possessed an extraordinary aptitude; the latter seemed to come to her by intuition. By-and-by it was proposed to try their voices, and a simple Italian air, one of the popular melodies of the day, was chosen as the medium. Emily acquitted herself extremely well, and was assured, on rising from the instrument, that she would make an excellent singer. Madaline sat down, looked at the notes for a few moments, hummed the opening bar slowly and plaintively, and then, as if inspired, flung out an absolute volume of melody; her tones, clear as a bell, rang through the schoolroom, and electrified her teachers. It seemed, also, as if she had herself become conscious of the development within her of a new sense. Music, and especially singing, became henceforth her great delight. Her hopes, her fears, her joys, her sorrows, all

appeared to express themselves in song. Her voice seemed to be—it really was—the reflex or echo of every feeling that stirred within her.

The first time the Rector heard her sing he looked like a man entranced. The flood-gates of some long-pent-up thought seemed to give way, and he gazed at the child in silence, large teardrops forming in his eyes, and rolling over his cheeks, by himself unnoticed. By little and little he grew accustomed to her strains, and they became one of the main solaces of his existence. If trouble at any time, or anxiety, disturbed him—and he had his own share of both, though he seldom allowed them to become public property—some old, and by others long-forgotten, melody which she sang at his bidding, operated upon him like sleep on a fevered patient. Physical fatigue itself yielded to the influence of her voice. In a word, the discovery of this new mine of pure enjoyment produced on his whole bearing a wonderful change. It raised him, or seemed to do so, above the earth. How he felt at this time—or

to speak more accurately—into what channels his thoughts were accustomed to fall, will be best explained, perhaps, by giving a few extracts from the correspondence which he kept up, at broken intervals, with a friend at a distance.

“ST BOTOLPHS RECTORY,                      , 1812.

“ . . . We have excellent accounts of Regy. He has escaped unhurt from the storming of Badajos, and writes in the best possible spirits. He speaks very highly of his cousin Charles, of whom he appears to see a good deal, their regiments being not unfrequently near one another. But I must tell you some of our home news. Our protégée is shooting fast into womanhood, and is as dear to us both as her sister. We always knew that she was the gentlest of living creatures, but her extraordinary abilities show themselves more and more every day, and every day renders her more and more like, in air, feature, form, gesture, to her sainted mother. Her you never knew till the shadows



of death were upon her. To me she never dies; and if she did, the child would bring her to life again every time she greeted me. It is her own sweet smile, her own most musical voice, her own glorious eye. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to my dear wife for the way in which she behaves to the child. It seems to me that she is almost more fond of her than of Emily, and the girls agree to admiration. Sometimes the thought occurs to me, that if we could bring about a marriage—but that is, I fancy, out of the question.”

“1813.

“. . . A new surprise, a new delight—if delight that may be said to be which has at least as much of sadness in it as of the opposite feeling—has come upon me. She has all her mother’s wonderful genius for music. She sang to us yesterday for the first time, in order that the master who comes to the girls from Plymouth might judge of their voices; and though never before to my knowledge had

she so much as hummed an air, the effect was astounding. It seemed to me that I was again in the old chateau on the banks of the Soane, listening to a voice which I hear constantly in my dreams, and building up castles in the air, with one blessed form prominent in them all. Oh, you do not know what the agony of that moment was, and what fierce thoughts, such as I had persuaded myself were banished for ever, rushed in to darken the vision. My friend, justice must be done to Madaline, let the consequences to others be what they may. I am mad when I think of the difficulties that stand in the way of setting her right before the world. Tell me when you write whether you still regard this matter as hopeless, and give me such tidings as you can of the wretched people whom I will not irritate myself by naming."

The answer to the letter, of which the above is an extract, need not be quoted, except in substance. It conveyed to the writer very

little information with which our readers are not familiar ; for it stated only that Lord and Lady Belmore had withdrawn altogether from London ; that their eldest son was in Parliament, where he made but a poor figure ; and that on the mystery into which the Rector seemed anxious to pry, no fresh light had been thrown. The document which they both prized was still in the bank. The writer had called on the previous day and saw it safe in its envelope. There it was, and there for the present it must remain, because, though not without significance, it had no legal value. But the time must come when, for the sake neither of the child nor of her mother, but the Rector himself and his son, strenuous efforts should be made to push inquiry to the utmost. Meanwhile, it was most satisfactory to know that his friend's domestic peace had not been disturbed by a proceeding which he regarded at the time, and still thought of, as rather Quixotic. As to the marriage, that was a

thing of the future. Marriages were made in heaven or in the other place. When was he to be favoured with the visit from his old friend and his household, which he had often been promised? There was nothing now to keep the Rector away from London, and the new house into which the writer had got was in the very best of the new situations, and quite large enough to hold them all.

One more extract from this correspondence, in which, as our readers have probably guessed, Mr Harris and Dr Sumner are the principals, and we pass on to other matters. It bears date May 4, 1814 :—

“We are mad with joy, as I doubt not you all are in London. Peace is restored to the world, and from week to week and day to day we look forward to the return of our noble boy, a captain, and all sound in wind and limb. The effect upon my household of this blessed hope is wonderful. His mother, self-possessed and sober-minded as usual, goes about

her daily business with just so much of a smile upon her face as tells what thoughts are busy within. Emily is wild and unrestrainable, like a young colt disinclined to be broken in. Madaline is her mother more than ever she was, and saying little, hides, or I am much mistaken, deep thoughts in her heart. I have inquired and found that the Rifles are to land at Plymouth, and whenever I learn the name of the ship in which Regy is embarked, I will be on the look-out for him. Yes, my friend, please God, after we have enjoyed the luxury of a first meeting at home, we shall all take advantage of your hospitable invitation. It is time that Emily should see a little more of the world than is visible from these hills, beautiful though they be, and Madaline must hear singers, possibly as brilliant as herself, though not more full of melody and feeling. And when we are together, we shall find time and opportunity to consider what must best be done to set the crooked straight. But not

for me or mine shall a single step be taken in advance. If we cannot vindicate *her* honour, shame and disgrace shall not fall more openly that they have done already upon the house to which I belong."

## CHAPTER V.

### REUNION.

EMILY HARRIS was right. This was the third occasion on which the Rector had put the horses to his carriage and gone off, after an early breakfast, to Plymouth—hoping now, as he had done before, that he would return bringing Reginald with him. For tidings had arrived a week ago that the transports were quitting Passages, and that their arrival in the Channel might be expected at any time. We are dealing, however, be it remembered, with an age when steam exercised no influence over ocean navigation, and the progress of convoys—for the war between England and America still continued—was necessarily slow.

Persons not specially interested in the progress of the fleet experienced, therefore, neither surprise nor impatience that it delayed its coming. Not so those who knew that on board one or other of the vessels composing it a husband, a brother, or a son had taken his passage ; and, least of all, the little group which sat that day under the catalpa tree on the lawn that fronted St Botolphs Rectory. Their position gave them a commanding view both of the river and of a long stretch of road that skirted it. And from that chalky line their eyes were scarce withdrawn for a moment—though, as we have just said, two of them appeared to be engaged with books, and the other with her stocking.

It was a clear, bright, sunny day. Scarcely a drop of rain had fallen for more than a week—a rare event in beautiful Devonshire—so that the roads were hard and flinty. No sound, except the rustling of a light breeze among the fresh foliage, and a chorus of singing birds, disturbed the air. The noise of wheels and horses' hoofs could thus be heard from afar,



and if a vehicle were approaching them a cloud of dust raised by it gave notice of the event long before the vehicle itself could have time to round the elbow of the hill. Few carriages of any sort made use of that road, however, except on market-days, or when the arrival of a fleet in the Sound created a sudden demand for the produce of the country. Now this was not a market-day, and for some time past only a stray vessel, a ship of war, or a merchantman, had put in to refresh. Accordingly, when over the intervening bank a white cloud rose, as it did just after the occurrence of the little conversation referred to in a previous chapter, Emily sprang to her feet, and standing on tiptoe, clapped her hands together, and exclaimed, "Here they come, mamma—here they come! I'm sure it's they!"

The blood mounted involuntarily to Madeline's cheek, and even Mrs Harris became slightly agitated. Neither of them moved. They had seen the dust as Emily did, yet

they kept their seats. When, therefore, a baker's cart in due time made its appearance, the keenness of Emily's disappointment contrasted almost ludicrously with the composure displayed by her companions as they witnessed its onward progress.

"If you had thought for a moment, my love," was Mrs Harris's answer to her daughter's bitter cry, "you would have remembered that your father has barely had time to reach Plymouth, if indeed he can have got so far. We need not expect him back for two or three hours ; probably not till evening."

"Oh mamma ! Madeline and you are such matter-of-fact people ! Who do you think can calculate time and distance to-day, except yourselves ? If they don't come soon I'll get Thomas to drive me after papa in the dogcart ; or I'll go to bed. Hark ! what is that ?"

It was the thunder of guns coming up upon the breeze—a sound, to the inmates of the Rectory well known, of salutes given and re-

turned, slow and measured, dropped for a brief space, and then taken up again.

“Now, darlings,” said Mrs Harris, cheerfully, “we have at last some reason to hope that Regy will be with us soon. That firing must be between the convoy coming in and the flagship.”

“To be sure it is! to be sure it is! Oh mamma, mamma! how soon do you think they can be here? Will they come in time for dinner? Well, well! don’t shake your head so. I know what you are going to say, but don’t say it. Madaline, let us go and get his room ready. I’ll gather the sweetest roses in the garden, and put them on his toilet-table. Come along.”

So saying, the impatient girl rushed off, and, doing a great deal more of damage than was necessary to the rose-trees, carried her spoils up to the chamber which had been set apart for her brother’s use. She found it, to her great surprise, already decorated. Toilet-table and mantelpiece had each its appropriate

bouquet, the delicate perfume from which scented the whole place. Of those books, also, which used to be his favourites long ago, a good many filled the shelves ; and on his table were arranged writing materials, complete even to the taper and the stick of sealing-wax. She turned away, half in anger, half in admiration, and, coming back to the lawn, poured out her griefs. Why was all this done without consulting her ? It wasn't fair to keep her in the dark. She should have liked her brother to know that she was as mindful of his tastes and comforts as anybody else. It was charming—it was beautiful—but she had not had any hand in it.

“ Never mind that, my dear,” replied her mother. “ I had no hand in it either ; but what both you and I desire is that your brother shall be pleased with the preparations made to welcome him home. From what you say of his room, Regy ought to be pleased ; but he must be very much changed if he ever takes the trouble to ask who arranged it for him.”

The group lingered on the lawn till the sun began to throw the shadows of the trees towards the east. By-and-by twilight deepened, when Mrs Harris and Emily stepped in-doors for a moment—the former to give some necessary directions to the servants, the latter to refresh herself—excitement and reaction having produced upon her their ordinary effects. Madaline alone kept watch, and now, with an amount of vigilance of which, while the eyes of others were upon her, she had given no signs, she peered into the deepening gloom. By-and-by her step sounded light upon the gravel walk, and calmly and quietly, speaking through the open window, she said, “I think I see them.” In an instant Emily flung down the cup of tea which she held in her hand, sprang through the window, and rushed off towards the gate which led from the garden into the road. Her mother followed, and, placing herself beside Madaline, on a portion of the lawn which commanded the clearest and most prolonged view of the

road, saw plainly enough an open carriage approaching, with two persons seated together on the driving-seat. That was enough. She too ran towards the garden gate. Presently wheels ground slowly up the ascent, then the panting of horses, overdriven, perhaps, and jaded, became audible. The sounds drew continually nearer, and by - and - by the phaeton pulled up. The next moment found Mrs Harris in the arms of her son ; the moment after, Emily wept upon his neck.

It was dusk, but light enough remained to let the mother and sister see what a noble-looking fellow he was. His war-soiled uniform—for no time had been allowed him to change it for ordinary clothes—set off his well-knit frame to great advantage ; and his face, bronzed by long exposure to the elements, was no longer that of a fair boy, but of a singularly handsome man. There was no small measure of womanly pride mixed up in the delight with which they welcomed him home. So it was with the servants, each of whom he greeted

with a warm grasp of the hand. They were mad with joy, and stood in one another's way while they strove to secure each some article of the very light baggage which alone he brought with him. But Reginald, while he smiled to see all this, and renewed again and again the embrace to his mother and sister, looked about as if in search of something that ought not to have been absent at that moment.

"Where is Madaline, mother?" he at last said. "She's not from home, is she?"

"Madaline? No, no, my boy, she's not from home. Is she not with us?"

"No, mother," he answered, and passing rapidly through the gate, saw the object of his inquiry standing apart upon the lawn. A few hasty strides carried him to the spot. His arm was round her, her face rested on his bosom, she did not utter a word, and his salutation amounted to this and no more, "My Madaline, mine own Madaline, are you the last to greet me?"

Who would attempt to describe the after incidents that characterised that joyous evening? How would the incidents themselves appear if they were delineated faithfully? The looks of warm affection interchanged; the melody of voices engraven on the memory, and now again, after years of silence, heard in their natural cadence; the happy laugh called forth by trifles, to repeat which would be to kill them quite;—what man not bereft of reason would venture to deal with such things, except in the vaguest possible manner? For there are occasions, and of one of such we are now speaking, when conversation, in the proper sense of the term, would be a burden; when the attempt to exchange ideas necessarily fails; when wit loses its point; argument is impossible; music itself becomes a positive intrusion; when all that is in us and about us is swallowed up and absorbed in the consciousness that one great leading hope has been realised. The various members of the little circle that gathered that evening round the Rector's din-



ner-table might, in their several ways, surrender themselves to that consciousness. But there it was—dominant alike over all, and rendering the hours that intervened between the soldier's arrival and the breaking-up of the party for the night so supremely blessed, that to give any account of them afterwards, so as to fix their details in the memory, was simply impossible.

In this state of ineffable happiness some days passed away. With early morning the young people were on the lawn. A little later the heads of the family joined them. Then came the family prayer, of which the recollection had been to the absent one like a loadstone, drawing his thoughts home from many a weary bivouac and many an anxious picket. Then followed the breakfast, with all its delicate accompaniments—the damask cloth, the hissing urn, the butter fresh and sweet from the churn, the fresh eggs, the bacon, the home-made bread. Let no one pretend to speak lightly of these things when first spread out before the soldier

just returned from four years of campaigning. After this the horses are led round from the stable, two saddled for ladies, one, sometimes two, for gentlemen ; or perhaps the old boat is put in order and launched, in order that once again those perilous voyages may be adventured upon, which scarcely try now, as they used to do half-a-dozen years ago, the courage of the navigators and the skill of their pilot. Nor were they absolutely selfish in their joy at the Rectory. Neighbours came, as they used to do in other days, with kindly greetings, though the girls seemed to be more shy than they formerly were ; and still dances are improvised in which the soiled rifle uniform continued to present as manifest an attraction as it did when, fresh from the hands of the tailor, it was for the first time put on. Very, very joyous days were these, on which all who lived them through continued to look back, under all circumstances, as among the happiest in their lives.

Reginald was, of course, struck with the

change which four years had made on Emily and Madaline. They were both women now, and eminently attractive women; for Emily, with all her impetuosity, was a true girl, her heart being ever, as the saying has it, wherever her head might be—in the right place. As to Madaline, he looked upon her with a mixture of wonder and admiration for which he could not account. She far more than realised the ideas of perfect beauty which had always been associated in his memory with his recollections of her. She was the same gentle, loving creature that he remembered long ago, and with that gentle and loving nature there seemed to be mixed up a maturity of judgment, a correctness of moral vision, which commanded not more his admiration than his respect. Her music charmed him, her singing entranced him. Yet there sprang up between them in their intercourse a sort of half-reserve, which sometimes troubled, though it more frequently startled and even thrilled him. He was too much her senior not per-

fectly to recollect the circumstances under which she first became a member of the family, and could not therefore deceive himself, as at one time he fancied that she did, into the belief that they were brother and sister. And yet they had lived together so entirely on the footing of brotherhood that the thought of regarding her otherwise than as his sister affected him strangely.

"Papa," he said one morning to his father as they strolled together through the meadows, taking an account of the appearance of the hay crops, and calculating the probable bulk, "who is Madaline? She is not my sister, that I know; and, loving her as I do, and as we all do, I sometimes fancy that perhaps it is better she should not be. But who is she?"

"I can't answer your question, my boy, at this moment. You are right in assuming that she is not your sister. But who she is I may not tell even to you till circumstances justify me in doing so—which as yet they do not. One thing, however, is quite certain, Madaline

deserves, both for her own sake and for the sake of her sainted mother, all the love we can give her."

"Well, I would not for the world ask you to violate a confidence, even in my favour. But tell me this. There is no stain on her birth, is there? Forgive me, papa," he continued, seeing that his father was much moved; "I did not mean to give you pain. I am very sorry for having done so. Pray forget that I asked the question."

"Why should I, Regy? It was most natural that you should. You are now old enough, and have seen enough of the world, to understand that things occur which are deeply to be regretted, and that the innocent often suffer for the guilty. But I can only repeat what I have said already, that as yet I am not justified in telling even you—and you know, my boy, how entirely you possess my confidence—anything more about Madaline than that she passed into my charge under circumstances which make her as dear to me as if she

were your sister. Time will, I trust, clear up the mystery in which at present her birth is involved. But whether it does or not, remember that, in the event of my death, I shall commit her to your care, and you will never desert her."

"Desert her, papa! Never. That you may depend upon. Will you be offended if I say that I sometimes allow the thought to enter my mind, though I put it from me as well as I can, that if you and mamma did not object, I should wish in another way to make her your daughter."

"My dear boy! My true-hearted Regy! That is bravely spoken. But you must not allow that idea too much to engross you. Wait till we see what time shall bring to light, and then you and I can talk over the whole matter more openly."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE INVITATION.

It was the very height of the London season, and of such a season as London never saw before, and will probably never see again. George IV., though still only Prince Regent, was in his glory. Emperors and kings rode at his side, and expressed becoming admiration of the diminutive and rather paltry military spectacles to which they were introduced. Night after night Carlton House resounded to the voices of wit and boisterous melody; Almac's—a recent invention—commanded the admiration of the world, and stirred up in every bosom, and especially in fair bosoms, a rankling desire to be admitted to its honours. For

awful tyrants were the lady patronesses. There was needed as much of solicitation, as strong an exercise of influence, to obtain admission to one of their balls, as to get a place at Court ; and greatly envied were the favoured few of both sexes to whom the doors of the assembly-rooms were thrown open habitually. For congregated there, on grand occasions at least, might be seen the very *élite* of English and Continental society—the grave and noble-looking Czar ; the not very stately Austrian Emperor ; the melancholy King of Prussia ; Blucher, grey and brusque ; the handsome Coburg ; our own glorious Duke—all of these, with innumerable heroes and statesmen besides, were, one by one, or gathered into groups, the observed of all observers. And of the other sex, had we not archduchesses, duchesses, countesses, without end ?—her of Oldenburgh, for example, with her comical countenance, and still more comical attire ; the Lieven, the Talleyrand Perigord, with English beauties, fairer and more seductive than them all—the Jersey,



the Willoughby d'Eresby, the Salisbury, the Castlereagh, not to speak of one just budding as yet into womanhood and fame, though destined to play by-and-by no mean part, as the bewitching Arbuthnot, in the world both of fashion and of politics. Besides, was it not at Almac's that the first grand breach was effected in our old-fashioned ideas of English decorum—when the voluptuous Spanish waltz took the place of the country-dance; and quadrilles, to the wonderment of all who understood them not, called up only the initiated to thread their mazes? Then the opera, with Catalani to electrify the audiences—Drury Lane, where the Kembles still reigned supreme, and Covent Garden, boasting its O'Neil, and rejoicing in the dawning talents of the elder Kean—were they not, as compared with the places of public amusement in these degenerate days, like the vale of Tempe to a Highland moor? Besides, our fashionables had in 1814 what we cannot command now, be our desire for it what it may—a silver Thames on which to ply their merry

boating parties; the stately oaks of Richmond Park, the horse-chestnuts of Bushy, and the lordly elms of Sion, under the shelter of which it was held to be neither wrong nor unbecoming that the proudest in the land should mix with their Continental guests in rustic revelry. Was not Nestor in the right after all? Is the present ever comparable with the past, whether we measure the strength and wisdom of the men or the beauty of the women, or the habits of life which have been and are not now—no, nor ever can, by the utmost stretch of ingenuity, be brought back again? Honour be to the spirited young noble who, some thirty or forty years ago, did his best to revive a taste for medieval sports! He didn't succeed, it is true, because knights and pursuivants sheltering under umbrellas seemed as much out of place as queens of beauty half drenched and shivering. But it was not his fault that the rain came down as it did. And if the spectators laughed at what they called the antics of their betters, it only showed that they had come

into the world at the right time. They would have been as much anachronisms in the fourteenth, or even the fifteenth century, as the English tournament perhaps was in the nineteenth.

Into London, thus wild with joy, Charles Harris entered within a few hours after taking a hasty leave of Baddlesmere and its inhabitants. He made straight for Belmore House. It did not suit his book to share the apartments of his elder brother, and he infinitely preferred the comfort of his own old room in the old house to an ordinary lodging. There were no clubs in those days such as now abound, not in London only, but in every considerable town of England. Even the United Service—the senior we mean, which has the merit of setting an example, which science, literature, the arts, and public convenience have followed—if it existed at all, existed only in embryo. But in their absence friends met in the lounge up and down Bond Street ; or, if they were military men, on the parade in front of the Horse

Guards ; or, if they indulged in play, in one or other of the billiard-rooms with which St James's abounded ; or should their tastes take a more burly form, in Tom Cribb's back parlour, in the Strand. Now Charles Harris was a military man, and an idler. He therefore betook himself, in the first instance, to the parade in front of the Horse Guards, and having picked up there a comrade, adjourned with him to Bond Street, where he soon found himself surrounded by friends. It followed, as a matter of course, that such of them as had houses in London carried him thither, and that in a very short time he, who had arrived in the great metropolis ignorant of its ways, and knowing no one, was swept into the full current of society and charmed with it.

"You know the Prestons, don't you, Harris?" asked his friend and brother officer Major Ludlow one day as they walked together arm-in-arm up Bond Street.

"I do, and I don't," replied Charles. "I remember meeting them once at a Winchester

ball, where my amiable brother blundered into an ugly scrape, out of which Lord Claud got him, by the by, very creditably. But I've never set eyes on any of them since. How could I?"

"Very true; I had forgotten. You went out with the regiment and came back with it. I wish you knew them, though. They're capital company, and they are going to give a splendid water-party on Tuesday next. Your brother knows them. By the by, I have not seen him of late so much as I used to do at Preston House. But he still visits there, and could, I am sure, introduce you. Get him to do this at once, and you're sure of an invitation. Lady Alice, who is one of the most charming women in London, told me that she meant to make it the most stunning thing of the season."

"I haven't seen my brother since I came to town, Ludlow. To tell you the truth, we don't care much about each other, and I'd rather not

be indebted to him even for an invitation to the Prestons."

"That's a bore," replied Major Ludlow. "I'd introduce you myself, only the fact is, that I am myself rather a new acquaintance of theirs, and I doubt whether they would approve of my taking so great a liberty."

"Oh, never mind," answered the other; "I can live though I don't be invited to the water-party this time. Possibly I may get to know them somehow, and join you at another."

"Yes, but this is to be the party of the season. By Jove! here comes a fellow who has impudence enough for anything. If he likes the look of you, he'll not only introduce you to the Prestons, but insist on their sending you an invitation. You don't know young Brunell, neither, I suppose?"

"No I don't; who is he?"

"That's more than I can tell you, further than this, that he's an ensign in the Guards, and has the run of all the best houses in town.

You see that he's deuced good-looking, at all events."

So he was, and he evidently knew it, yet not in a way to disgust or repel. Without being impudent, he was entirely self-possessed, though his age could hardly exceed eighteen at the most. What else Major Ludlow had said about him was strictly true. Without any high connections, with the moderate fortune of a country gentleman's son, he had been taken up by society in London with all that capricious intensity which pervaded it in 1814, as much as it pervades it now. Married women especially—and especially those among married women who had once been belles, and were beginning to fade—raved about him. He had the *entré* at Almac's. He danced there with the lady patronesses themselves. He was their "beautiful boy," and was up to every new fashion of quadrille, waltz, Spanish contre-dance, and what not. What use he may have made of the favours of these dames was best known to himself; but

it is due to his memory to add, that of a mean or dishonourable action no human being ever accused him. If husbands were indifferent to the influence which he seemed to exercise over their wives, that was their look-out, not his. The unmarried women courted him too ; but it was in a different way, and to their blandishments he seemed to be generally indifferent.

Such was the very young man who, walking alone, and flourishing his gold-headed ebony walking-stick, approached Major Ludlow and Charles Harris. One sentence descriptive of his costume may be of use, as letting our readers know what was considered the very pink of elegance in the age of which we are writing. A hat, considerably broader at the top than at the bottom, with very wide brim, slightly curved inwards on each side, surmounted his head. A handkerchief of blue silk was round his neck, over which the collar of his shirt, limp and unstarched, reached to the ear, and pointed upwards towards the eye. A blue



swallow-tailed coat, very short in the waist, very long and pointed in the skirts, with bright brass buttons, covered his shoulders and arms. A red brass-buttoned waistcoat just covered the waistband of a pair of light fawn - coloured pantaloons, over which were drawn a pair of Hessian boots, with long black silk tassels. From each of two fobs a massive gold chain and seals dangled, showing that the youth carried two watches ; and smart patches of embroidery, broadest near the waistband, lost themselves in sharp peaks just where the fork began. Finally, buff doeskin gloves covered his hands, and a gold eyeglass, suspended from a gold-mounted hair chain, dangled from his neck. Such was Julius Brunell, "the pink of fashion and the mould of form," who stopped, transferred his cane to his left hand, elaborately pulled off the glove from the right, and shook hands with Charles's companion.

"What is it to-night, Brunell?" asked Major Ludlow. "Does the fair Lieven open her

salons? or Catalani fling her spell around? or Carlton House, are its hospitable doors unbarred? Rather warm work these crushes at this season. Or are you going to Oxford with the crowned heads?"

"No," replied the youth, smiling. "I'm supposed not to be sufficiently distinguished to get an LL.D. degree. There is nothing, as far as I know, out of the common going on to-night. But let us petition the clergy to put up the prayer for fine weather on Tuesday. A shower on that day would be a great public calamity."

"Oh, you are alluding to the Prestons' water-party. Is their list full? Could we find room for one more guest, if he proved eligible?"

"I daresay we might," replied the youth. "In whom are you interested?"

"In my friend and comrade Captain Harris, Lord Belmore's second son, whom I have the honour and pleasure of introducing to Mr Brunell. He's a perfect paladin. He's been with his regiment all through the war in Spain,

and coming home covered with laurels, has yet his way to make in that more enticing field where my friend Brunell carries all before him. Can we manage to get him invited ? ”

Mr Brunell raised his glass, looked Charles hard in the face, and dropping it again, said, “ I don’t think there will be much difficulty about that. Where shall I have the pleasure of sending you the card, Captain Harris ? ”

Charles, only half-relishing the sort of air with which this process was gone through, told him that letters addressed to Belmore House would be sure to reach him. And then, the youth holding out his hand, Charles could not refuse to accept it.

“ I hope that we shall often meet again,” said Mr Brunell, just so far patronisingly as to excite in Charles a disposition either to laugh or bid the boy go to the devil, he didn’t know which. “ On one head, however, let me give you a caution. Don’t fall in love with Lady Alice. Our friend Ludlow is mad upon her, so is your brother—have you not a brother in the House ?

—and so are fifty other fellows that I could name. She gets them all into her net, and will get you too if you don't keep my caution in mind. Oh, you doubt me, do you? or consider yourself Alice-proof? Well, well, we shall see. Thank heaven, I am fancy-free, at all events! though heaven knows it took all my fortitude to resist the spell. By-by; you shall have your card either this afternoon or to-morrow."

"Well, what do you think of Adonis?" asked Major Ludlow, as the really handsome youth walked away.

"That I never saw such a provoking young pup. Hang the fellow! he's not insolent enough to rouse one's anger, nor silly enough to make you despise him. What are his prospects?"

"That which is vulgarly called going to the devil," replied Major Ludlow, "or I'm very much mistaken. He is the fashion to-day; he'll be thrown over to-morrow. I believe his private fortune is small, and though he econo-

mises surprisingly, it's next to impossible that he should not get into debt. London will become too hot for him then, and if he don't exchange into a marching regiment, he will probably end his days as consul, and a poor one, at some trading town abroad. He's been of some use to-day, however, for you may depend upon it that you'll get your invitation to the water-party."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A WATER-PARTY.

NOBODY ever said that the prayer for fine weather was read that Sunday in any of the London churches, but the results were in every respect as satisfactory as if it had been read in all. A finer day never dawned than that which the Duchess of Preston had fixed upon for what she called her water-party. And a water-party doubtless it was, so far at least as that at Chelsea Stairs—which by special licence of the Commissioners were to be approached by the broad walk through what were then the water-gardens of that national institution,—three or four barges, gorgeously fitted up, assembled an hour or two after noon on the gala-day. As

many guests as chose had it in their power to be wafted in these barges on the crest of the rising tide as far as Sion, of which the grounds had been kindly lent for the occasion ; while the rest were free to use their carriages, the provision being made that nobody should arrive at the scene of action later than four o'clock. For at that hour her Grace had made arrangements for feeding with the choicest delicacies which Gunter could turn out, some five hundred ladies and gentlemen, of whom she expected that the younger portion would dance on the green afterwards to the notes of two or three well-selected bands, under the light, partly of a full moon, partly of coloured lamps suspended from bough to bough after the manner of Vauxhall or Ranelagh. It was a novel idea ; and in spite of the proverbial faithlessness of an English climate, the London of glorious 1814 took it up greedily. The day, as we have just said, proved to be propitious, and the gathering was enormous.

Charles and his friend Major Ludlow agreed

that they would go together by water, and the latter, at least, was the more induced to adopt this course, that Lady Alice made him acquainted with her own purpose to lead the procession. She was in great spirits when he called upon her to settle the plan of campaign, comparing herself to Cleopatra, and wondering who would undertake to play the part of Mark Antony. "For we take with us in the bow of our barge the band of Brunell's regiment, and Brunell himself has promised to shed on us the light of his countenance. I suppose it wouldn't do to make an Ascanius of him. I could not do so, at least, even if I were old enough to enact Dido ; but mamma might. It would be such fun to get him posed so as to appear resting on her shoulder, just like the picture in the Delphin Virgil, you know. To be sure, we don't read that Dido received Æneas in her barge. It was in a hall or a cave, was it not, that she made love to the father by petting the son? Perhaps we may find a cave, or something that will pass for one, up at Sion. In



the barge I must be Cleopatra. Who'll be Mark Antony? Will you, Major Ludlow?"

"In the barge or out of it, yes. You know the play, of course—'All for Love, or a World well Lost.' Who would not lose a world for Lady Alice Tremanere?"

"That's nonsense. I didn't mean anything of the sort. By the by, who is this Captain Harris whom 'the beautiful boy' has persuaded mamma to invite?"

"Just as nice a fellow as you'd wish to see, and as good a soldier. He is Lord Belmore's son—a younger son, though, I suspect."

"Oh, then, he's a brother of the member for Old Scratchum, who has not come over to us, by the by, as I expected he would do, but the loss of whom, I am told, won't ruin us. Do you know the elder brother also?"

"Slightly—scarcely at all; indeed Charles is worth a dozen of him."

"Bring him with you, then, to my barge; for I expect you there, whether we play Mark Antony and Cleopatra or not."

Charles Harris and Major Ludlow met where it had been arranged that they should meet—at that gate of Chelsea Hospital which Wilkie has immortalised by introducing it into his grand picture, “The Reading of the Waterloo Despatch.” They gave their horses to their grooms, and passing through the eastern quadrangle, turned down to the left, leaving the noble chapel and hall behind them. A long, broad gravel walk, shaded by dwarfed limes, and skirted on either hand by a canal, led them down to a paved terrace, where a gate left open in a stout iron railing enabled them to penetrate to the river-side. There, covered in by awnings of various colours, and profusely decorated with silken streamers, lay three barges, each having its crew of twelve stout rowers, and each with its gilded helm and richly-painted couches. The strains of martial music already mingled with the sound of voices, for a band occupied a foremost place in the leading barge, and all were filled, or soon became so, with ladies and gentlemen

dressed in the very height of fashion. Thousands thronged the banks on both sides ; hundreds of old and maimed warriors, in long red coats, gathered on the terrace to see the procession start. It waited till the turn of the tide was felt, and then, one by one, those richly-laden vessels cast themselves loose, and amid deafening cheers held their course, "youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm."

Never had Lady Alice looked more bewitching than that day. The three or four years which had passed over her since Charles Harris last saw her in the ball-room at Winchester seemed to have added rather than taken away from the gracefulness of her figure. She was rounder and fuller, but not one whit less sylph-like than she had appeared to him then. Her attire, without being gorgeous, was in the best possible taste, and her manner bewitching. She was making herself agreeable to all about her when Major Ludlow brought forward his friend to introduce him, a

procedure which she manifestly expected, and which she took in the best possible part.

“ I am much obliged to Major Ludlow for reintroducing to me one whom I can't regard as a stranger. We have met before, Captain Harris, and should not have been so long without renewing our acquaintance, I think, had you not been far more usefully employed than we have been. You are one of our heroes.”

Charles might or might not be a hero among men. He felt himself terribly put out on being thus kindly greeted by a beautiful woman. But he recovered his composure speedily, and strove, not unsuccessfully, to join in the light conversation which best befits such light occasions. He found Lady Alice bewitching. She appeared to lay herself out to make herself agreeable to him. Each object, as the barge passed it, she pointed out to him, as if he had been a foreigner voyaging for the first time upon the Thames. Cheney Walk, with its Don Saltero Tavern,

and the quaint, old, tall houses that face the river ; the old church of Chelsea ; the gardens of Fulham Palace ; Fulham, with its picturesque wooden bridge,—all these were in succession dilated upon, till by-and-by the beautiful grounds of Sion House loomed in the distance, becoming every moment more and more distinct. And a very striking scene it was that gradually unfolded itself to their gaze. Under the shady elms, along the grassy slopes, groups of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen were scattered, some wandering about, others seated on benches and chairs, while up upon the brèeze came the swell of music, mingling, not very harmoniously, it must be allowed, with the strains which the band embarked on board of Lady Alice's barge continued to pour forth. And now, as they near the landing-place, fair faces and manly forms crowd down to greet them, every countenance beaming, as it seemed, with benevolence, and every voice pitched at the exact key of pleasure. They are soon ashore ; so are the crews

of the barges that follow ; and away they all rush, blithe as birds, to disport themselves amid "glades and coves and bosky dells," regretting only that the Duchess had forgotten to request in her invitation-cards that they should come to her revel in the character of shepherds and shepherdesses.

"I say, Brunell," observed Major Ludlow, as he and the "beautiful boy" sat together slightly apart from the throng, "the fair Alice is after her old tricks. She is determined to have the world at her feet. Only see how she is casting her spell over Harris. By Jove! he'll be caught, as sure as fate. Devil take her! I wish she were either less attractive, or not quite such a determined flirt."

"Oh, you are one of her slaves too, are you?" replied the other. "Now, I decline to be victimised. She tried it with me for a while, but it was no go. For my part, I infinitely prefer married women. A fellow's always safe with them, unless he make an ass of himself."

"Which you, my fine fellow," thought the Major, without expressing it, "are decidedly doing, as you will discover by-and-by to your cost."

Major Ludlow had taken a perfectly correct view of the case as between Lady Alice and Captain Harris. It fell in with her humour to add that young gentleman to the long list of her adorers, and she left no art untried to accomplish her purpose. She made him sit beside her on the grass at feeding-time; she pledged him in champagne; she appealed to his judgment if by chance she found herself at a loss on any point, and repaid his attentions with smiles that pierced him through and through. Long before the dinner was over, Charley had become as much in love with Lady Alice as it was in his nature—as yet at least—to be with any one. The feeling might not be exactly the same that came over him when poor gentle Lucy Cox first owned that he was very dear to her. It may be doubted whether there was in it

half the tenderness, half the purity, which thrilled through him then. But his vanity was flattered. It was impossible to deny that the lady was perfectly beautiful, and he imagined that to run away with her that moment would be the most exquisite arrangement in the world. Lady Alice had her way.

And now, the fragments of the feast being abandoned, in part to certain elderly ladies and gentlemen who thought the wine excellent, in part to the servants, who made short work of all the rest, the young, and those who aspired to be still regarded as young, betook themselves to the ball-room, a lawn as smooth and soft as velvet, on which the moon was beginning to throw her silver rays, softening as well as intensifying the light that fell upon it from a thousand coloured lamps festooned and suspended from the trees. An admirable band made the air melodious with its notes, and forthwith a score at least of sections, pleasantly matched, broke off into as many sets of what was then the dance of all dances, the



quadrille. Charles of course claimed and won the hand of Lady Alice. She made him drunk with the grace of her movements, and half wild with the music of her merry laugh. By-and-by he led her up to waltz ; and as both were at home in the mysteries of that measure, and trode it with peculiar skill, they became, without intending it, objects of admiration to the whole company. The movements of others became gradually suspended, and alone they whirled, with slow and cadenced step, round and round, inside a charmed circle. They stopped at last, surprised and half ashamed to find themselves the observed of all observers, when a gentleman whom Charles imagined that he ought to recognise, but whose identity nevertheless he failed to make out, came up and requested, somewhat abruptly, that Lady Alice would do him the honour to dance the next quadrille with him. She looked only half-pleased at receiving this compliment, and made the excuse that she was tired, and would probably not dance again.

"But if you do dance, may I count upon having the happiness of dancing with you?"

Charles, who saw, or imagined that he saw, a marked disinclination on her part to dance with the intruder at all, interposed by observing that he was afraid he had a prior claim upon the lady's hand.

"I take my answer from the lady herself," replied the stranger, haughtily. "I don't allow any one to play the go-between in those cases."

"Play the what!" exclaimed Charles, in like manner bridling up.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed Lady Alice; "is it possible you don't know each other? Why, Mr Harris, this is your brother, Captain Harris, just returned from the wars, and therefore one of our heroes. Captain Harris, this is the honourable Member for Old Scratchum, a distinguished, though a Whig senator."

"George!" "Charles!" So the brothers greeted one another; while Lady Alice, glad,

as it appeared, to escape a scene, fell off from both, and was soon lost in the throng.

"You have been some time in town, I believe," observed the elder of the two. "I should have thought that you might have looked me up before this."

"If you knew I was in town, you must have known where to find me," replied Charles. "Belmore House stands where it used to do, and I am perfectly satisfied to fix my headquarters there."

"You may fix your headquarters wherever you please, but I have to request that you will not come between me and any object on which I am bent. You have struck up a wondrous intimacy with Lady Alice Tremanere. You are making yourself a little too conspicuous with her to suit my book."

"Suit your book! Why, what the deuce is it to you with whom I strike up intimacies?"

"In general, nothing; but in this instance a great deal. I intend Lady Alice for myself."

"The devil you do! Then you had better make haste' and secure her, for, by Jove! I'm mistaken if there be not a dozen rivals in your way."

"If there be, I request that the number may not be increased to thirteen. But you speak like a fool, as you always were. Where is Lucy Cox?"

"What's that to you? If I speak like a fool, you speak like a bully. That might pass when we were boys; it won't do now."

It is possible that this rising quarrel between the brothers might have come to a head on the spot, but that a sudden rush of the guests at this moment towards a refreshment-room marquee separated them. They did not meet again in the course of the night; indeed, the elder, by what motive influenced was best known to himself, quitted the grounds immediately; while the younger, finding that Lady Alice rather shunned him now than otherwise, moped about for a while, out of heart and out of temper. He then hired a wherry, of which

multitudes were lying about in mid-river in expectation of a job, and, getting himself landed as near as possible to Belmore House, went to bed very little satisfied either with himself or the rest of the world.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### REFLECTION.

CHARLES woke next morning not very much in better humour than he had been when he went to bed. He regretted the quarrel with his brother. He had no particular affection for that individual, and knew that George cared little about him; but it was unseemly for persons so nearly related to fall out; and he knew that his mother, of whom, in spite of her errors of judgment, he always thought with tenderness, would be distressed by it. Lady Alice's behaviour also chafed him. There was no occasion that he could discover for her to avoid him, after the rencontre with George, unless, indeed, which he could hardly believe,

she had encouraged George to propose for her ; and if the case were really so, then her treatment of himself throughout the earlier part of the evening was quite unjustifiable. His conscience smote him, too, for not having looked up George earlier. He could not plead the excuse of ignorance of his brother's address, for with that Lord and Lady Belmore had both furnished him before he left Baddlesmere ; and though it was very true that George had been equally made aware of his arrival in Belmore House, still it could not be denied that it was more the business of the younger than of the elder brother to make the first advances. Thus various thoughts chased each other through his mind as he lay awake preparatory to getting up. The result of them was, that he determined to proceed, immediately after breakfast, to Harley Street, and there come to a full and amicable explanation with George, if the latter would allow him. While he is preparing to carry this resolution into effect, we will turn our spectrum towards the

honourable Member for Old Scratchum, and put ourselves *en courant* with his state of mind and general circumstances.

We left George Harris some time ago recently returned to Parliament, and taking the line there into which, somewhat abruptly, a sense of irritation drove him. Of the extraordinary end of Mr Fitzgerald, common rumour and the newspapers informed him. Not caring one straw about the man, the manner in which he made his exit from the stage of life did not give to George Harris one moment's trouble. The fate of his old tutor, when it was described to him in a letter from Baddlesmere, affected him differently. He felt no compassion for the man; he did not care what became of him: but the realisation of his own ideas as to what it would be right to do to Mr Thompson, long before, gave him exactly that measure of content which induces us to say to a neighbour, when he becomes ruined by the breaking of a bank, "Didn't I tell you so?" As to his own career in the House of Commons, it proved to



be, in every respect, a dead failure. Having voted once with the Opposition, the Opposition ever afterwards claimed his support ; and the Duke of Preston, to whom more than once he went for advice before dividing, invariably recommended him to divide with his father's friends. Possibly it might be because he felt himself thus thrust into a false position that he took no trouble to gain the ear of the House. Once or twice he tried to speak, but after the first attempt, which failed, he was constantly coughed down, till in the end he resigned himself, not without a sense of bitter mortification, to the prospect of being reckoned among the dregs of his party.

His social position did not improve all this while ; it rather deteriorated. Invitations to Preston House came less frequently than they used to do, and hardly ever, as they once did, to meet persons high in office. Plenty of cards to her Grace's routs and balls reached him ; and now and then the leaders of the Opposition honoured him with invitations ;

but it seemed to himself that he did not hold the place in society to which his rank and expectations entitled him, and he resented the circumstance as a personal wrong. Towards his mother's old associates, on the other hand, he turned a cold shoulder. Once or twice he showed himself at Mrs O'Hagan's parties, where he made the acquaintance of the beautiful Lady Belmore—one of two sisters, both of them blown upon, though both highly gifted. Mr, now Sir Joshua, Hogarth's dinners were better, and he partook of them from time to time, for there he met really distinguished persons, statesmen, and warriors, and men of wealth, the patrons of art and the associates of artists. But his heart yearned for the intimacy at Preston House which had once been afforded to him, but from which, he could not understand why, he seemed now to be cut off. Thus season after season passed with him. He tried, when the recess came, how life at Baddlesmere would suit him. He made the experiment only once, and it was an entire

failure. In after years his stay in the paternal home never exceeded a week, beginning with the first day of pheasant-shooting, and ending when the covers were thinned. Brighton, Weymouth, Bath, were all resorted to in their turn ; and brief sojourns in the houses of his parliamentary friends, together with a month's stay in Leicestershire during the hunting season, helped him to get through the autumn and winter. But not once was he the guest, as he much desired to be, of the Duke of Preston at Berkeley in Yorkshire, though, in the early days of their acquaintance, that pleasure had been often promised to him. Poor fellow ! his case was a sad one enough. He had put a most extravagant value upon himself. He had fixed his heart on wedding Lady Alice Tremanere, not so much because she was a duke's daughter, as because he really loved her, in his own way, with all his heart and soul. And neither, as it seemed, were Lady Alice or her relatives disposed to make to him the advances which he expected, nor could he per-

suade the rest of the world to take him at his own valuation. Over and over again he had found himself on the eve of proposing to the young lady. Over and over again, as in the case of Colonel Protheroe, he had taken it into his head that a rival stood before him; and now, at the end of three years, he was, so far as regarded his love-affair, exactly where he had been at the beginning, with this exception, that the opportunities of ascertaining how the lady's humour jumped were fewer than they had been, and threatened every day to become fewer still. He was in this plight when the occasion of the Duchess's garden and water party brought out a new gorgon to scare him. For the first time since his brother's return from Spain he had encountered him there, to find that he also was, or appeared to be, an aspirant for the hand of Lady Alice.

The House did not sit on the night of the Duchess's party. Both Houses, indeed, took the work of legislation very easy during that season of triumph; so George Harris, after

escaping from the grounds of Sion, found himself free either to go to bed, or in excitement of a different sort to seek a respite from his anxieties. He preferred the latter course, and directing his horses towards Kensington, pulled up at the gate of a handsome house standing back from the road, and fronted by a high wall. A considerable string of carriages was drawn up on both sides of the gate, and from the open windows came forth the sound of voices chanting a sort of recitative. His groom rang the bell: he himself alighted, and, passing up a spacious staircase, found himself in a saloon which had been fitted up for private theatricals. The piece selected for performance was 'Don Juan'—not the 'Don Giovanni' as arranged by Mozart, but a play, in part pantomime, in part opera, wherein were represented scenes such as would hardly be tolerated nowadays even at the Alhambra. The actors were at the closing stage of the drama when George Harris entered, and figures as nearly nude as was consistent with the most

remote pretext at decorum floated about the stage to the sound of voluptuous music. The slight interruption caused by his approach seemed to be resented by an audience which, composed of well-dressed persons of both sexes, was intently occupied with what was before them. They took no further notice of him than by uttering a suppressed cry of Hu-u-sh! But the stone statue soon broke in, the naked nymphs fled hurry-skurry behind the side-scenes, and in a very harmless shower of very small sparks the gallant Don Juan disappeared. Then long breaths were drawn, and ladies and gentlemen facing round began to greet each other with marks of recognition. George was in the midst of many old friends now, and made some new ones. Among others, Lady Selina Kidd pounced upon him, that she might introduce him to the god of her idolatry, a young and noble poet, whose lameness scarcely operated as a drawback upon the perfect symmetry of his form and face. The haughty bard looked at the new-comer as-

kance, bowed, and relapsed into warm flirtation with his innamorata. He was single, she married. George turned next to the beautiful Lady Kingston, on whom her old lord waited, but who seemed entirely occupied with a French noble, a man strikingly handsome, and noways inclined to reject her proffered favours. He made other advances, in other quarters which we need not stop to particularise, but either his own success disgusted him just as it seemed to be secured, or the appearance of indifference repelled him, and he turned away. The fact is that he had come to this strange gathering at an unhappy moment. It is not when chagrin devours us, or disappointment chafes, that we can enter into dissipation so rank as that which wooed him there. He gave it up in despair, and, hastily descending the stairs again, drove off, and betook himself to his lodging.

The clock was striking one as he crossed his own threshold. His servant brought him a flat candlestick, naturally expecting that he

would go to bed ; but wearied as he was, both in mind and body, he declined the implied invitation. On the contrary, he ordered brandy-and-water to be brought, and, telling the man not to sit up, made himself a tumbler of strong punch, and drank it at a draught. The spirit, without producing the slightest intoxication, roused and set him thinking. There floated through his mind a shadowy panorama of all the main incidents in his past life. It seemed to him that there was a marked difference between his own condition and the conditions of other young men socially his equals. Why was he so completely alone in the world ? Why had he always been alone ? His rank and fortune entitled him to seek and to find intimacies among the noblest and most distinguished of the land. But though he sought, and from time to time flattered himself that he had found, such intimacies, in every instance they failed him, after a brief trial. It is very painful, especially to a proud man, to have the conviction forced on him that society cares



nothing about him. A hard nature may take little account of the love of mankind, accepting that expression in its noblest sense. But there are no natures so hard, no dispositions so callous, as to be indifferent to the thought that mankind neither loves nor fears them. On the other hand, the harder his nature, the more egotistical his temperament, the less is a man disposed to admit that the fault in such a case rests with himself. It is invariably to others that he owes the slights which are dealt out to him, or the mortifications which he goes through. George Harris was indignant with everything and everybody, except himself. His father had done him infinite wrong by not taking his proper place in society. What right had he, a peer of the realm, to shut himself up at Baddlesmere, instead of taking a lead, as he was quite qualified to do, both in the senate and in London life? Was it fair to his family, and especially to his eldest son, that he should be cut adrift and left to make his own way in a profession, or without one, just as if he

were nobody? And his mother, too—what had she done for him? Nothing—worse than nothing. He could not recall the time when she associated familiarly with any except the scum of society. She had not a single friend, she had not a single acquaintance, in her own rank of life. As a boy, he recollected only actors and actresses, literary people, and suchlike, coming about Belmore House. At Baddlesmere they had been visited by nobody except the vicar and his family. And now it seemed as if this religious craze of hers had driven even the vicar and his family from them. His mother had done him infinite wrong. Was there a cause for this? By heaven! he didn't know what to think; but of this he was certain, that thought, if it ran much further in the direction to which it was turning, would drive him mad.

He mixed another tumbler, and drank that. Gradually, as the stimulant took effect, the nature of his dream changed. The image of his mother made way for that of Lady Alice, and to his own exceeding surprise he found

himself soften by degrees towards her. It was not to be wondered at that she, the daughter of a duke, and one of the loveliest women in London, should be run after and admired. It was still less surprising that her head should be turned with the adulation that was offered to her. Why should he take so much to heart now that which he had seen and borne within her for years? Why? because that impertinent puppy of a brother, whom he always did dislike, whom he now hated, had presumed—curse him!—to put in his claim for the prize which he himself coveted. Oh! he would make that hound repent it. Covered with laurels, forsooth!—one of her heroes! By Jove! if he only had him here, wouldn't he wring the monkey's neck.

He filled a third tumbler, and drank that. Thought grew hazy, anger melted away. A maudlin sentimentality took its place, and he wept. Yes, he knew now what to do. He would risk all. He would propose to Lady Alice on the morrow, and know the best and the worst at once. If she accepted him, father,

mother, brother, all would be taken to his grateful heart. If she rejected him—well, well, there was a remedy against that misfortune too. And so he staggered to bed, falling instantly into that state of dull forgetfulness which gives no refreshment to mind or body while it lasts, and, departing, leaves us in a ten times worse plight than ever.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE DOCTOR'S PARTY.

CHARLES HARRIS adhered to his determination, and having breakfasted, ordered his horses, and rode off in the direction of Harley Street. He struck into the ride in Hyde Park, near Kensington Gardens; and turning to the left at Apsley House—a very different edifice then from what it is now, and in different ownership—skirted upwards in the direction of the Oxford Road, keeping Park Lane on his right hand. He was walking his horse leisurely along, when a familiar voice, coming he could not guess from what direction, called him by his name. He looked about, but saw nothing till the shout was repeated, and then he glanced

upwards, and beheld, standing on a balcony that projected from one of the houses in Park Street, his cousin Reginald. The recognition was at once prompt and mutual.

“Holloa, Regy! what’s brought you to town? What are you doing there, old fellow?”

“Come up and see, Charley—come up and see!”

The last speaker did not, however, by this time stand alone. There had crowded out upon the balcony, immediately on the utterance of his first shriek, two or three ladies and a gentleman, all of whom turned their eyes upon the object of Reginald’s attentions.

“Come up, Charley—come and let me introduce you to my father and mother—they are dying to make your acquaintance—and so are these two nymphs, my fair sisters. Get through the gate there, and I’ll come down and guide you to the door.”

He rushed away on saying this; while Charley, thinking no more about his brother, or the business that had brought himself out thusearly,

moved towards the gate that gave him egress into Park Lane, and was there presently joined by his cousin. Their greeting was very warm and very sincere. Charles dismounted, gave his horse to the groom, and, after a hearty shake of the hand, put his arm through that of Reginald, and was led round by him to the front door.

The house, to the door of which Reginald guided his cousin, was that of Dr Sumner. It was a handsome mansion, well planned and very commodious, the front of which was in Park Street, while the rear looked out over some low buildings that skirted Park Lane, into the Park. The drawing-room was well furnished, especially with books and pictures; indeed the whole place had the air of belonging to a rich bachelor, whose learning was considerable and his tastes elegant. The hour being yet early—for noon had not struck—the Doctor was busy in his consulting-room seeing patients. It was therefore exclusively to Mr and Mrs Harris, Emily, and Madaline, that Reginald introduced Charles. There was some slight

hesitation, especially on Mr and Mrs Harris's part, in their reception of this new relative. Mr Harris, in particular, seemed to be taken aback, as men are apt to be when those with whom they ought to have been on terms of intimacy, yet never saw before, are suddenly brought face to face with them. The feeling, however, in whatever cause originating, was of brief continuance. Reginald had always written and spoken of his cousin Charles in the highest terms ; and after the first shock passed off, Reginald's father and mother remembered only that they were called upon to offer a hearty welcome to their son's friend. With respect to the girls, they greeted their kinsman each after her own fashion. Emily was frank and cordial — Madaline gentle, and, without being cold or repelling, somewhat reserved. As to Charles, he, on the other hand, soon made himself at home ; and expressed, what he really felt, great satisfaction at being at last recognised by such near relatives.

It appeared that Mr and Mrs Harris, their



son and daughters, had arrived at a late hour the previous evening, after posting all the way from Devonshire, and spending two nights on the road. They had as yet seen none of the sights, nor come across any of the distinguished persons with whom London was crowded ; but they were all dying, especially Emily, to enter upon that career of dissipation which they came from the beautiful valley of the Tamer expressly to run through. The difficulty with them was how to make a beginning. That evening the Doctor had invited some friends to meet them at dinner ; and after dinner there was to be a small party, chiefly—so Emily said—in order that Madaline and she might hear some good amateur music, both vocal and instrumental. They had no other engagements, however, so she counted on being taken to the theatre very soon, and to the opera, and to any other place of public amusement that might be open.

“Places of public amusement, my fair cousin ?” replied Charles, with a smile ; “cer-

tainly, you must see them all—the theatres, the opera, and Vauxhall Gardens too. But we must do better for you than that. There's to be a grand review shortly, the stands for seeing which are, you may observe, getting planted in a line with your drawing-room windows. We must get places for you there. And the routs and balls are endless this season. To some or all of these you must go."

"You forget, Charles," observed Mr Harris, "that your cousins are the daughters of a country clergyman. They have no claim whatever on the gay world, for the best of all reasons, that neither they, nor I, nor their mother, can boast of being known to a single leader of fashion. And as to seeing the review, don't you think they can manage that just as well from the balcony as from the stand, and save themselves a good deal of trouble and pushing through the crowd?"

"Why, yes, perhaps they can," replied Charles; "but then the stands will be filled by the cream of London society, and the

girls would naturally like to see and be seen in good company. Not know a single leader of fashion! what does that signify? Depend upon it, the leaders of fashion will be glad enough to find an excuse for bringing such fresh fair faces as these within their charmed circle, even if the wearers had less claim upon them. But your daughters are Lord Belmore's nieces, uncle; and I fancy that the Duchess of Preston herself would not look upon it as an act of condescension if she extended her invitations to Lord Belmore's nieces."

"That as it may be, Charley," replied Reginald, with a laugh. "My sisters, when they know you as well as I do, will have the same personal regard for you—not because you're Lord Belmore's son, but because you are a right good fellow. But, to tell you the truth, we are none of us dying to go to routs, and put very little store on our patent of nobility."

"Speak for yourself, Regy," interposed Emily, looking very animated, and therefore very handsome. "I confess that my ambition

does extend to being crushed in a duchess's drum, and getting my frock torn at an arch-duchess's ball. Don't mind what he says, cousin Charles, but use your influence to get Madaline and me invited, if possible, to Almac's itself. What say you, Madaline? What are your views, mamma?"

"That it's a very natural wish in you to see as much of London life as you can, my dear," replied Mrs Harris, "especially considering that you were never in London before, and may never be in it again. But have some mercy on your chaperone; for you can't go to dinners and balls without me, you know."

"Oh, you'll enjoy them just as much as I shall, mamma!" rejoined Emily. "But that quiet mouse Madaline, what does she think about it?"

"That I mean to go to every dinner and ball that I am invited to," replied Madaline, looking archly at her sister; "that is, if mamma goes with us."

The conversation, if such it could be called,

was here interrupted by the entrance of Dr Sumner. He, too, had finished his early morning's work, and was about to go the round of his outlying patients, though not before making his guests aware that a carriage and horses had been placed at their disposal. To Charles he bowed—as he would have done to any person who had come, as he took it for granted the gentleman had done, to call upon his friends—and was going to withdraw again, when Mr Harris detained him.

“I want you to know my nephew, Sumner : this is Captain Charles Harris, Reginald's comrade, as well as cousin.”

The Doctor turned, looked hard at Charles, and then held out his hand. “I am glad to see you, Captain Harris. If you have no better engagement—and, all things considered, I think it probable you have not—come and meet your uncle and cousins here at seven o'clock this evening.”

The Doctor departed, and Charles found himself so charmed with the society of his newly-

found relatives, that he forgot altogether that he had a brother, far more that he had proposed to see and make up with him the difference of the previous evening. He had accepted the Doctor's invitation to dinner, and now volunteered his services in guiding the rustics in their search after lions—such as London lions then were. He carried them first to the exhibition of pictures by modern artists—comparatively a novel institution—of which the locale lay in Somerset House. Wilkie and Haydon were then in the first flush of their renown, and the “Rent-Day” at once fixed and retained the attention of the sight-seers, especially of Madaline. She seemed to catch both the spirit of the artist and the national temperament of the people whom he had transferred to his canvass. Charles was much struck with the depth of her remarks, and gazed with irrepressible admiration on her face as it lighted up with excitement and varied its expression. He had begun by attaching himself mainly to Emily. Now, without being him-

self aware of it, he kept continually beside Madaline, whose conversation, frank and rich with thought, enchanted as much as it surprised him. He had seen, when first introduced to her, that she was very beautiful, and that her beauty was a contrast rather than a foil to that of her sister. He discovered now that, though both were charming, Madaline was a creature of a different, and, as he felt, a higher order to that of Emily. Both, however, pleased him much, and it rejoiced him to find that he had got into a circle wherein even his brief experience of life assured him that much more of reality, and infinitely more of heart, would be found, than among the gaudy butterflies whom only a few hours ago he had regarded as the most attractive of nature's handiwork. Before the visit to the exhibition came to an end he had expelled the image of Lady Alice from his fancy, and was preparing to set up another on the vacant throne, though which of his two cousins it should be, he persuaded himself that he was undecided.

We pass by the visit to the Tower, which, with its menagerie, its state prisons, its white tower, its armoury, and crown jewels, filled up all the time there was to spare before dinner. In the Tower, not less than among the works of our English artists, Madaline's interest ran in a channel of their own. She cared little about the wild beasts, still less about the stacks of muskets and swords, which her companions admired ; and even the instruments of torture, taken out of the ships which composed the Spanish Armada, scarcely drew from her a passing remark. But the old armour, indifferently as it was at that time arranged, riveted her attention. Visions of knightly deeds rushed into her mind, and unconsciously she quoted whole passages from "Marmion," still holding its own, as it then did, even against "The Giaour" and "Childe Harold." The memorials of themselves left by long-forgotten captives on the walls stirred her imaginative spirit as she stood among them. She thought of Lady Jane Grey, the gentle



child, and her boy husband ; of Ratcliffe and Kenmore, and many other martyrs to principle, and wondered whether enough of the old spirit were left anywhere to make any human being, noble, knightly, or plebeian, hazard fortune and life in the defence of truth, or what he believed to be truth, if it were assailed.

The sisters returned to Park Street pretty well worn out with fatigue. Charles made what haste he could to dress at Belmore House, and rejoined his friends at the dinner hour. The dinner itself was exactly such as a man of Dr Sumner's habits and position in society might be expected to give. Everything was excellent, and served in the best possible taste ; while the guests, not too many in number, consisted, besides ladies, of men eminent in arts, letters, and their respective professions, with here and there a member of Parliament well known for his talents. It fell to Madeline's lot to be conducted to her place by Wilkie—an arrangement which Dr Sumner, after being told of her enthusiasm over the

"Rent-Day," made it a point to bring about. The quiet unaffected manner of that distinguished man, improved rather than damaged by his broad Fife accent, perfectly delighted her, and drew out her own powers of charming to the fullest extent. Chantrey also was there, sitting on the other side of her, and exhibiting with no mean powers of conversation the modesty which best befits a man just rising into eminence, and which never to the day of his death suffered in his case a momentary eclipse. Charles had conducted his cousin Emily to her place. He sat opposite to Madaline and the two artists, and if Charles had admired his cousin before, while as yet the echoes of the past alone roused her, he thought now, when he saw her interested in the present, and offering to living genius the tribute which the gifted, and especially the gifted among women, are ever forward to do, that he had never looked on anything so lovely. He could not withdraw his eyes from her ; and, if the truth must be told, more than once he ran the risk of

offending her sister by the broken attention which he paid to her remarks. Yet Emily was very happy too. Lord Claud Tremanere, who sat between her and Mrs Joanna Baillie, appeared quite as much taken by the natural elegance of the country girl, as by the more stately manners of the authoress ; and found her well disposed to appreciate his attentions, and to prove to him that she was not unworthy of them. On the whole, the dinner was a perfect success.

By-and-by the ladies withdrew, and the gentlemen passed the claret for a while with the goodwill and vigour which was then usual in the best society. There was no excess, however, nor any desire to exceed, for presently the door-bell gave frequent notice of the coming in of fresh guests. Then, after a brief pause, could be heard the challenge of instruments brought one after another into tune ; and then, as if by common consent, the Doctor and his friends rose. For Dr Sumner was himself a musician of no mean skill. His voice was still a good

bass voice, and he touched the violin delicately. The amateur concert was therefore, in its own way, as perfect a success as the dinner had been. But now a new surprise and a new delight came upon the whole company. The Doctor pressed Madaline to sing. She blushed, hesitated, would have declined to do so, but that Mrs Harris came to the support of the host. She sat down to the instrument. Her heart beat so violently, that to breathe a note clear and unbroken seemed to be an effort too much for her. Gradually, however, as she ran her eye over the piece that had been selected for her, and found that it was her own favourite, her courage returned. She began in a low and uncertain tone. By little and little the voice grew firm, till everything passed out of her mind except the spirit of the song, and the enthusiasm it never failed to awaken. Then came forth, as it was wont to do in the little drawing-room on the banks of the Tamar, such a volume of sweet sound as electrified the hearers. There had been, as is usual, a slight

buzzing of conversation when the singer took her place at the piano. There was now silence unbroken throughout the room, which continued for several seconds after the last note of that most thrilling melody had died away. Then came forth thunders of applause. Then eyes, unused to weep, seemed to carry moisture on their lids. Then, some speaking gently to Madaline herself, others to the Doctor, and to Mrs Harris, expressions of admiration came forth which for once revealed the real sentiments of the speakers.

“Who is that wonderful creature, Doctor?” said Lord Claud, whispering in Dr Sumner’s ear. “I never heard a voice like that except once, and then I was a boy. Who is she?”

“She is a Harris, that is all I know, and very proud the Rector is, as he has every right to be proud, of her.”

“Is she a daughter of Mr Harris? How very unlike she is to her sister.”

“So she is, but Emily is a dear good soul too. They’ve been but four-and-twenty hours

under my roof, and I've lost my heart to her already."

"Well, Doctor, you couldn't do better. If the lady be willing, why not?"

"We don't marry our daughters, nor our granddaughters, in this country, though, if I were twenty years younger than I am, I'm not sure that I would not try to take your advice."

"Whether you take my advice or not, I'm inclined to believe that any man might do worse than marry Miss Harris if he could win her. And considering the stock from which she springs that is a large admission on my part."

"Oh, but you don't know the Rector. He is a truly noble fellow. Any one having his blood in his veins cannot be other than a true man or woman."

"He must be different from his brother, then, and his brother's brood."

"No—not all the brood. The young fellow who sat on the other side of Emily Harris is an excellent youth."

"Then he bears little resemblance to his

brother. However, I should like, if you give me leave, to know more of your favourite branch of the family."

"Come and look them up when you please. They will not disappoint you, that I undertake to promise."

## CHAPTER X.

### AFTER THE PARTY.

LORD CLAUD TREMANERE has been so long out of sight, that a word or two, just to bring him back to the recollection of the reader, may be desirable. He was the Duke of Preston's second son, and, if not in talent, certainly in moral character, stood far above his elder brother, the Marquess of Morney. While the latter gave himself up to pleasure, and especially to wasting excellent abilities on objects wholly unworthy of them, Lord Claud took to politics, and soon won and retained for himself a place among the class of able men whom every Government is glad to find early employment for, in offices such as usually pre-



cede and educate their occupants up to seats in the Cabinet. Not long after we made our first acquaintance with him he married a woman to whom he was much attached. But she died within the year, after giving birth to a son, and from that hour Lord Claud withdrew in great measure from society. Not that he resigned his seat in the House of Commons, or wasted his time in useless repining. His attention to public business became, on the contrary, more unremitting than before ; and he found in employment, as wise men usually do, the best solace to private grief. His grief was, however, very deep-seated. It caused him to hold almost entirely aloof from the gay world, and to seek in another and more sober circle the companionship without which the human heart must speedily run to seed. Dr Sumner had attended Lady Claud in her last illness. He took so deep an interest in his patient throughout, and sympathised so entirely with the widowed husband when all was over, that there sprang up between them feelings

warmer than usually connect persons, the threads of whose existence have not been drawn along lines parallel in the web of life. Lord Claud found in Dr Sumner not an able physician only, but an accomplished and well-read man. He seemed to derive from the companionship of such a one greater comfort than from aught besides, and they took to each other in consequence, as only men whose natures are in tune one with the other are apt to do. Lord Claud was pleased, also, with the friends of his friend, most of whom had, by their personal exertions, raised themselves out of the common throng ; and without entirely turning his back upon what may be called his own proper set, he made himself one with another, not less well-bred than they, and infinitely more companionable. It was thus that he came to be Dr Sumner's guest on the evening of the day when the Rector of St Botolph's and his family arrived in town. And it was thus that he and the Doctor did not hesitate to converse, as we have

just heard them, in a somewhat free and significant manner about one member of that family in particular. For the Doctor understood the inner nature of his noble friend at least as well as his noble friend understood it himself. He knew that Lord Claud was not formed to lead the life of unsympathetic loneliness which he was now leading. It had long been clear to him that a nature so affectionate must have something more to cling to than memories of the past. Bear in mind that ten years of widowhood are not like ten years spent without the kindling of the only fire that warms us into forgetfulness of self. For though it be true that he who has never loved in earnest may live out all his days without desiring anything better, it is not less certain that true love, once given and received, becomes both to man and woman a necessity of their existence. Hence, after the first violence of grief had expended itself, the Doctor did his best to turn the thoughts of his friend towards a second marriage. Nothing came, however, of these

well-meant suggestions. Lord Claud, as it seemed, could not discover what, unconsciously perhaps, he was looking for—a spirit kindred to his own—a woman capable of filling the great void which oppressed him. And so year after year rolled on, each finding him, as the other had left him, solitary amid a crowd.

He was in this state when Emily Harris crossed his path. The peculiar style of her beauty fixed his attention. She seemed to him to be naturally and unaffectedly good-humoured. Her manner towards himself was just so far deferential as that of a girl is apt to be to a man twice her age. In short, he was greatly taken with her. Emily, on the other hand, had heard of him before they met as a man of talent. She found him now graceful, attentive, and entertaining. She was much pleased with his conversation, and showed it in her general bearing. What came of all this we shall see by-and-by. Meanwhile our business is with other persons in this drama.

And, first, with respect to Charles Harris, on whose moral being the events of the day, commonplace as they might well be considered, seemed to have brought about an entire revolution. He had found, all at once, something for which, through life, it seemed to him as if he had been looking. He understood at last the meaning of the term domestic affection. It appeared to him that, since he gained admittance into his cousin's family, a sealed fountain had been opened in his own heart. How he loved and admired both his uncle and aunt! How kind and considerate they were to him and to all around them! How tender and confiding one towards the other! What charming girls, too, were Emily and Madaline, yet how strangely his feelings towards them differed! With the former he seemed to be as much at ease as if they had been playmates from childhood. The latter—why did his brain turn round as he thought of her? Was it her strange and peculiar beauty that awed him, or the quiet reserve of her ordinary

manner, or the deep feeling which breathed through her marvellous singing, or the extent of knowledge, especially on art, which came out in her conversation?

No, it was not one of these things in particular, nor yet the whole combined, but rather the mysterious entity round which they were gathered—the centre, so to speak, from which they emanated—just as the rose is a centre whence beauty and sweet odours flow, or the sun emitting its rays of light and heat, which are not the sun, yet the abstraction of either of which would render that which is now the sun the sun no longer. Charles had never thought of man or woman before as he now thought of his cousin Madaline. She seemed to him a creature whom to approach, except reverentially, would be an outrage on nature. She was far too good, far too noble, far too wise, “for human nature’s daily food.” Yet on her his thoughts rested all the way home to Belmore House with a distinctness of perception such as they failed to accord to any

other member of the circle from which he had parted. And when he laid him down to sleep his dreams were of her exclusively. Those large, dark, lustrous eyes of hers! he saw them turn upon him with an expression so tender that it melted while it startled him. He heard her voice, too, as distinctly as he had ever heard the voice of human being, and it was plaintive even to bitterness. He started up, woke in the act of doing so, and tried, but in vain, to recall the words to which he had been listening. No such phenomenon had attended his intimacy either with Lucy Cox or Lady Alice. Each in her turn had caught his fancy, but their hold upon him was never such as to give reality to his very dreams. The night which he spent was not by any means a happy one, yet he would not have had it different from what it was for the world.

How fared it, meanwhile, with the inmates of the house in Park Street—the Doctor and his friends? They gathered together—as

family groups are wont to do after the departure of their guests — partly to discuss the merits of individuals, partly to deliberate over the general effect of the party. The Doctor took little share in the conversation, but he noticed, not without secret satisfaction, that all greatly liked and spoke well of his friend Lord Claud ; and that Emily's praises, if not the loudest, were exactly such as he could have wished them to be. It was about cousin Charles, however, and the impression he might have made, that Reginald seemed most curious — a feeling which seemed to deepen into something more than curiosity, both with the Doctor and Mr Harris. Well, cousin Charles was an exceedingly nice young man. Emily pronounced him to be worthy of all the good things that her brother had said of him. Madaline thought him well-bred and most obliging. She confessed, indeed, that from the time they sat down to dinner her interests had been too much engrossed by other people, and especially by Wilkie and Chantrey, that she



almost forgot his existence. He had made himself very pleasant all the morning, and she quite believed that he deserved to be Regy's friend. The rest came in for their criticisms one after the other, but the criticisms themselves would scarcely bear repetition. Let them remain in obscurity.

"I'm not sure that I altogether like this new intimacy," observed Mr Harris to the Doctor, after the rest of the party had retired to their rooms. "The young man himself appears to be unexceptionable, but we can hardly receive him into the family as one of ourselves without receiving his brother also, and there may follow proposals and invitations which it might prove as difficult to evade as it would be hazardous to comply with. I wish the boys had not met."

"It would have been better, perhaps," replied the Doctor, "if they had not; but the deed is done now, and any appearance of restraint or coldness on your part would only work mischief. I know nothing, of my own

knowledge, about the brother, but if what others say be true, you are not very likely to be troubled with advances from him. They tell me he is a proud, shy, self-conceited fellow. He would consider it a degradation to visit such as I, and your being under my roof will probably save you from a call, if, indeed, he ever hear that you are in town."

"He can scarcely avoid hearing that much from Charley. But, as you say, it is idle to fret over the inevitable. We must take whatever comes, and deal with it as prudently as circumstances will allow. I don't think Belmore will ever ask me or any of mine to visit him at Baddlesmere. It is not very probable, after such a long absence from town, that either he or my lady will come up on purpose to seek us out, yet the awkwardness of our relations with people so closely connected, cannot but awaken curious thoughts in the minds of the children. They did not trouble themselves about the matter so long as our roads lay wide apart. But now that

their cousins have found them out, they will naturally wonder why their cousins' father and mother should take no notice of their father and mother, nor be noticed by them."

"What a wonderful creature Madaline is!" observed the Doctor, his thoughts apparently wandering into a new channel. "I think I never saw such a perfect face and figure; and her talents seem to be as striking as her personal appearance. Has she any idea that she is not your daughter? for I can't avoid noticing a certain restraint in her manner, as if some secret influence withheld her from making known her great love for Regy."

"I have more than once imagined the same thing myself, and, to tell you the truth, am a little at a loss how to take it. Yes, she knows that she is not my daughter. The discovery was made in a provoking way while they were children. But Mrs Harris and I both try to persuade ourselves either that she has forgotten all about it, or is determined not to let the circumstance interfere with her feelings towards

us and the children. I confess, however, that on more than one occasion little incidents have occurred to shake our faith in the theory of forgetfulness ; and what you say about your own impressions satisfies me that she has not forgotten."

"And you would be well pleased if Regy took a fancy to her, and she to him—is that your view of the case?"

"Yes, it is. Nothing would more delight me."

"But is Regy aware how matters stand?"

"Perfectly. Only a day or two before we left home he asked me who she was, and hinted at his wish to make her my daughter in reality, provided there was no stain on her birth."

"Did he make a proviso of that sort?"

"No, no—not exactly that. I do him injustice. He is too noble a boy to visit the sins of the father upon the child. His inquiry as to the possible stain on her origin had nothing to do with his half-avowal that, if his

mother and I approved, he would marry her. Yet they have grown together so completely as brother and sister, that in spite of my love for both of them, I can hardly bring myself to contemplate their marriage without misgiving."

"I can enter into your feelings ; but what then? They only supply another strong motive for trying at once to solve the mystery in which her origin is involved. I really think, Harris, that you carry your regard for what you call the honour of your family a great deal too far. Justice to those nearest to you requires that they should not be kept out of what belongs to them of right, especially by their father—if what we believe to be true is capable of proof. And I can't help believing that, in the face of the evidence which we possess, incomplete as it is, no attempt would be made to resist the claim, if it were made immediately. I have always said, and I say it again, that you are acting on a mistaken principle."

"But what good could come of opening such

a question, unless we had the means of forcing it to a successful issue? All that we have to show would not reverse the existing state of things. It would only leave on the public mind a conviction that we are a set of thorough-paced scoundrels, one and all."

"Well, take your own way. I scarcely admire your determination. I certainly cannot approve your course of action. At all events, we had better get the packet out of the bank, as was agreed before you came up, and be decided by the effect which it produces upon us."

"There can be no objection to that. We'll see to it the first time they leave us to ourselves. Good-night."

The two gentlemen took up their candles and went to bed.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE OPERA.

BROKEN and heavy was the sleep of George Harris throughout the remainder of the night in which we left him seeking to drown care by a method which in truth was by no means familiar to him. Broken it was, and continued to be all the day after, throughout which he felt himself incapable of the slightest exertion. Scarcely could his servant prevail upon him to taste even a cup of tea. At last, on the morning of the second day, he awoke, suffering the agonies of the damned. To the mental distress, which had scarcely been suspended while he slept, was now added the fever incident on strong potations, the racking headache, the

deadly sickness, the utter prostration of every energy. To be still, was sad work ; to get up—the very thought drove him mad. His servant had been to call him at the usual hour, and his toilet was prepared. He looked at it with dismay, lifted his head from the pillow, uttered a heavy groan, and lay down again. At last, with a desperate effort he got out of bed, and after repeated pauses, during which outraged nature had her way, contrived to dress himself. Why it was that he got into his present plight, what he intended to do, when he proposed to do it, and under what circumstances—all these were to him at that moment mysteries inexplicable. The utmost extent to which his reasoning powers could stretch was this, that he had been somehow or another very ill-used ; that somebody or another had ill-used him ; and that he was determined to have it out with the authors of the wrong, be they who they might. Beyond that limit no exertion on his part proved equal to carry an argument, and even to that he reached



only after he had tried to brace his nerves by the application of soda-water and brandy.

By little and little the sickness incident to strong waters subsided ; and in proportion as the body regained its tone, shadows—one darker than another—began to gather in huge volumes over his mind. The past came back aggravated and embittered, as, under such circumstances, whatever is disagreeable in the past never fails to do. The coldness of the Preston family, the evident indifference of Lady Alice, the neglect of the world, the insolence of his brother, the equivocal position in which the eccentric behaviour of Lord and Lady Belmore placed him,—all these things rose up before his morbid imagination in terrible array. What was the worth to him of a seat in the House of Commons, or the certainty that one day or another he would take his seat in the House of Lords if he lived ? Every hope he had ever formed betrayed him. Every wish he had ever given himself up to ended in disappointment. Better to be dead than lead

the life he was leading. And then to think of that beastly brother of his being taken by the hand and caressed, while on him people looked cold. He would not stand it ; no, he couldn't. D—n Lady Alice ! He didn't know whether he most hated or loved her. Hated her ! oh, no, no, no ! She was dearer to him than ever. She was the air that he breathed, the sunshine that warmed him, the gentle shower that, falling on his hard dry soul, alone had power to soften and refresh it. Oh ! he could die for her. And then, bursting into tears, he wept, and maundered just as men are prone to do when just beginning to recover the use of their reason after a more than ordinarily severe debauch.

It was late in the day before George Harris felt himself in a condition to go abroad. A glance at the mirror showed him that even then his appearance was not exactly such as to commend itself to the good opinion of his friends. His over-night determination to seek out Lady Alice and the Duke, and to bring his

relations with both to a definite issue, had by this time recurred to him. But it is one thing to form a brave resolve before we go to bed—it is quite another to act up to it when we rise again ; and George, glad to find an excuse for deferring what was, to say the least, an enterprise of doubtful issue, determined that the enterprise had better be deferred. He couldn't present himself to his lady-love, looking, as he did then, like an idiot. And if he could, the chances were that he wouldn't find either her or the Duke at home. And that thought, by the way, suggested another and a more reasonable line of action. Why not write ? Why not make his proposals on black and white ? which the strange combination of pride and self-distrust that was in him suggested he could do with greater dignity, as well as with more effect, on paper, than by word of mouth. Yes, he would write.

He sat down to his desk, mended a pen, spread out a sheet of the softest bath-woven gilt-edged paper, dipped his pen in the ink-

bottle, and then paused. What should he say? If he gave the reins to feeling he would certainly make a fool of himself. If he checked and restrained it, trying to express himself as became one who knew that he was entitled to the honour which he craved, he might get stilted and belie his own purposes. He pushed the paper from him with an oath, shut the desk, and ordered his horses. A hard gallop would do him good. His brain would be clearer after exercise. The horses were brought, and, attended by his groom, he made for the Regent's Park. It was then in its infancy. The enclosure had only recently been effected; but the walks and drives were all laid out: and the trees, though young, except in patches, thrived and flourished. Regent's Park is a very beautiful park, as all who live in or near it aver. It scarcely deserved so to be spoken of half a century ago; yet half a century ago a good score of equipages rolled round it for one that takes that direction now. Among horsemen riding

for exercise, it was a favourite resort. Thither George turned his horse's head ; and, putting the animal into a canter, dashed away in the direction of Albany Street. Fewer equipages than usual happened to be on the drive that day. One of those countless *fêtes* which were for ever going on, had carried the bulk of the fashionables to some other point, so that George was able to notice, while yet a considerable space divided them, his brother riding towards him. He was not, however, riding alone. He and another youth, whom George could not make out as one he had ever seen before, seemed to be escorting an open carriage, in which were seated three ladies and a gentleman. Involuntarily George slackened his pace as Charles drew near ; while Charles, not less rapid than his brother, leaned forward, said something to the party in the carriage, and then pulled up. It was evident that Charles's communication, whatever it might be, was not without interest to those who received it. Their coachman

got his horses into a walk, and so held them while the brothers encountered.

"I'm glad we've met, George," said Charles, holding out his hand. "I meant to be at your lodgings yesterday morning, and to tell you then, as I tell you now, how sorry I am that any words passed between us. But as I was on my way to Harley Street, whom should I see but our cousin Reginald standing on a balcony in Park Street. He hailed me, and I found that not he only, but uncle Sydney, aunt Maria, and their two daughters, were in town. They are all in that carriage. Come on! let me introduce you to them. They are capital people—worth a thousand of your Prestons and that d—d set from top to bottom."

"That may be your opinion, Charley;" replied George, not refusing the proffered hand; "but it's not mine as yet. However, let's go and see what they are like—though, to tell the truth, I don't feel quite up to making new acquaintances to-day."

"You don't seem well, certainly. What have you been doing with yourself? Egad! now I see you fairly, you are positively ghastly. You look like a man who had been drinking hard, and up all night. What's wrong?"

"Nothing very particular," replied George, forcing a smile, which was far from improving his appearance. "These late hours in the House don't suit me."

"Was there a House last night? Oh, I daresay; but come along."

George turned with his brother, and riding up to the carriage, went through the ordinary course of an introduction to his relatives. His manner towards them all was cold and stiff. Reginald, in particular, he bowed to with the air of one who honours an inferior with an act of recognition. He shook hands with none of them, but looked them through and through as if seeking to discover whether it was their fault or his that only now, for the first time, had he become aware of their existence. Their manner

towards him—especially that of the Rector—whether induced by his or otherwise, was not, it must be confessed, very cordial. Only a few commonplace remarks passed among them; and then, without either an inquiry from him respecting their whereabouts in town, or a voluntary proffer by them of their address at Dr Sumner's, they parted. George, lifting his hat, turned round to resume his ride, and the carriage, escorted as before with Charles on one side and Reginald on the other, drove on.

"I can't say that I've fallen in love with our new cousin," observed Emily, after they reached Park Street, and Charles had gone home to dress. "He may be a very clever man, and a very good man, but he's anything but agreeable."

"He looks out of health," replied Mrs Harris, "and bad health doesn't usually make people agreeable companions."

"He gives himself prodigious airs," added Reginald. "Charley is quite savage with him. They had some words, it seems, the other night,



and Charley went out of the way to make it up with him before bringing him to us. It's not a good sign of a fellow's heart if he sulk after a difference is compromised. Confound him! does he think we care a farthing whether he condescends to be hearty with us or not?"

Mr Harris did not join in the conversation, which probably on that account soon came to a close. To his wife, however, he remarked, as they were dressing, that he was not ill pleased with the turn which matters had taken. It was awkward enough to be on terms of intimacy with one of his nephews, having ceased to keep up any intercourse with his father and mother; it would greatly add to the inconvenience if both the young men were to have the *entrée* of the house. Besides, all the accounts he had received of the elder of the two were unfavourable to him. How ghastly he looked, too! If the wretched creature were adding—as appearances denoted—habits of intemperance to his other bad qualities, his end

would be fearful. Poor fellow ! he was much to be pitied, however.

It was arranged that Dr Sumner and his friends should go that night to the opera. The Doctor had, indeed, a private box placed at his disposal ; and Charles, as a matter of course, was invited to be of the party. They dined early ; and in good time, so as to witness the whole performance from the beginning of the overture to the close of the ballet, the carriages were announced. The Doctor took under his special charge Mrs Harris and her daughters. The young men went with Mr Harris in the second carriage. What a vision of grandeur burst upon the astonished senses of the younger of the ladies as they took their seats ! The enormous size of the house—its gorgeous crimson trappings—the light subdued rather than dazzling, which a thousand wax-candles shed over it—the gay dresses of the audience, and especially of the female portion of it, glittering in diamonds—all these

enchained and kept their imaginations busy while the overture held its brilliant course. But when the curtain rose, all else except the sights and sounds which came to them from the stage were forgotten. They were passing—so it appeared to them—into fairyland. Those exquisitely-painted scenes—could they be other than realities? And the stately figures that went and came among them, were they not what they seemed to be—kings, queens, nobles, messengers, soldiers? Then the glorious voice of Catalani herself—how it rang through all the house! how its notes thrilled in the hearts of the audience, and especially in such of them as for the first time came under their spell!

“Look at Madaline, my dear,” whispered Mrs Harris to her husband. “The excitement is too great for her. I am afraid she will faint.”

No, she did not faint; but larger and larger grew those lustrous eyes, paler and more pale became that exquisitely-turned cheek, and short and quick came the breathing; but at last a flood of tears acted upon her like a refreshing

shower upon a parched-up flower-bed, and she hid her face in her handkerchief and wept quietly.

"This is too much for you, my Madaline," said Reginald, in a low soft tone; "let us go home."

She turned upon him a look so soft, so tender, so full of feeling, that not without an effort did he succeed in keeping his own deep emotion under. What passed through the minds of these young people at that moment it is not for us to say. Enough is done when we state that the remainder of the evening passed with both in that state of supreme enjoyment which makes the deeper impression that they who come under its influence neither can nor try to account for it. They all got home very tired, but very happy.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FIRST MOVE.

GEORGE HARRIS, having parted from his relatives, put his horse again into a canter, and regained by degrees, as the exercise told upon him, something of his natural vigour both of body and mind. His thoughts turned involuntarily, in the first instance, towards the persons from whom he had just separated. Somehow or another—he could not say why—he didn't like them. It was not that he felt hurt at the tardiness of the recognition which they had extended to him. That was their loss, not his. But neither their manner when they did acknowledge him, nor the expression

of their countenances, called up on his part one particle of goodwill. They seemed rather to give than to receive a favour in conversing with him, and he had no idea of being patronised by a country parson, even though the parson was his uncle. Besides, it chafed him to think that his brother should have been the means of bringing them together; for, in spite of their recent reconciliation, his brother seemed to have become even more than ever odious in his eyes. How was it that people took so to that puppy, and not to him? He was the eldest son, the heir to the peerage. Neither was it any great self-flattery to assume that in information, personal appearance, and standing in society, he was every way Charles's superior. Yet Charles made his way—indeed was courted—while on him only cold looks were turned; and that thought naturally called up others which were neither more consolatory nor more cheering. Could it be that Lady Alice had taken a fancy to Charles, whom she had never seen in her life except once before, and who

must be at least a year, if not two years, younger than herself? or was her conduct the mere result of that craving after admiration which, he could not but acknowledge, entered largely into her character? Then the Duke had grown quite indifferent about him; the Duchess gave him only cold civilities: he had failed in the House of Commons; he had not one friend in the House or out of it to whom he could open his mind. He was nobody, nobody—and he knew it. Let not our readers imagine that the state of mind which these revelations indicate is either unusual in the world of living men, or lightly to be thought of. There are no miseries more acute than those which we create for ourselves by looking at the outer things of life through the medium of self, misunderstood and exaggerated in its proportions. Call the impulse that moved George Harris what you will—pride, vanity, selfishness, disordered imagination—it was fruitful to him in very bitter fancies. He almost wished himself dead, and might have

done so, but that other memories interposed and checked this rising idea.

How unwisely he had acted in not following his father's advice, and trying to win distinction at the bar before rushing into Parliament! In Mr Williams's chambers he had been in some sort looked up to and courted. Had he only persevered in his studies, he might have been by this time leader of one of the circuits; or, if not quite so far ahead in the race, at all events he could not doubt but that he would have commanded a large business. This would have filled his mind—given him something real to think about—gained for him a place among men such as all would have recognised—saved him the mortification under which he now laboured. There was Majendie, for example, his former fellow-pupil—certainly not his superior in natural ability, and with far less of interest among attorneys—see how he was getting on! What a good fellow he was, too! How he used to explain difficult points in law to him at their evening discussions, and



come about him, and be always ready to oblige! Why had he not cultivated Majendie's acquaintance? Why should he not try to gather it up again now? Why not? ay, why not? He would try to gather it up. He would go at once and see whether Majendie were in his chambers, for Majendie had by this time chambers of his own; and if he found him unchanged, why, then, old acquaintance might ripen into new friendship, and be made useful.

The determination, thus strangely formed, was promptly acted upon. Instead of returning home, as he had intended to do, George Harris directed his course towards Lincoln's Inn, and after some brief inquiries, found out the block of building in which Mr Majendie resided. He dismounted, gave the bridle to his groom, ran up two flights of steps, knocked at the door, and was admitted. Mr Majendie was at home, but a solicitor was with him just then. Would the gentleman take a seat in the clerk's room, and favour him with his name? The gentleman's card being handed to the

clerk, was carried into the presence ; and an answer came back that Mr Majendie would be disengaged in five minutes. Presently there passed the open door of the clerk's room a gentleman with a bundle of papers under his arm, and the bell rang to make the clerk aware that his master was alone.

The effect of this brief pause on George Harris was curiously characteristic. Why had he come here ? What purpose could a renewal of his acquaintance with Majendie possibly serve ? Was he going to sue to a stranger for the sympathy which, among all with whom he lived on terms of daily intercourse, none gave him ? Was he fallen so low as that the friendship of one who seemed prepared a year or two ago to lick the dust off his shoes if he had desired it, could be anything worth to him ? No. He was thus brooding over the absurdity of the position into which an unaccountable but very foolish impulse had thrown him, when the clerk rose from his stool, and begged him to follow. He did so mechanically, and found himself in

Mr Majendie's presence without having framed or fabricated any excuse which might account for the intrusion. The embarrassment caused by this reflection was, however, of brief continuance. Mr Majendie no sooner recognised his visitor than he jumped up and came forward to meet him, holding out his hand, and giving to that which was received into his own a hearty gripe.

"My dear Harris, I'm delighted to see you. It's a long time since we met, but I haven't forgotten the pleasant hours that we spent together before I became the hard-worked lawyer, and you the man of fashion and member of Parliament. Let me hope that you're not here on business—not come to consult your old friend about some confounded suit. Tell me what's brought you into these unknown regions, and how you feel outside of them."

The cordiality of the greeting—so little deserved, and going so far in warmth beyond his most sanguine expectations—had a wonderfully mollifying effect upon even George Har-

ris's hard nature. He returned Mr Majendie's grasp, and spoke the truth, or something not far removed from it, when he said that his present visit was dictated by the mere desire to renew an intimacy of which he retained very pleasant recollections. But a nature morbidly selfish, like that of the honourable member for Old Scratchum, cannot long keep its own cares or projects in the background. Mr Majendie was not slow in discovering that his former brother-pupil was out of sorts; and a few pertinent questions soon brought to light both the trouble and the reasons for it.

"In short, Harris," he said, "you've taken the wrong line in life—at least you believe so. But why believe anything of the sort? You have wealth, station, a seat in Parliament, a coronet dangling over your head—what, in fate's name, could man wish for more? You've not gained the ear of the House! Who ever heard of any one not a heaven-born statesman gaining the ear of the House of Commons at your age? You are not treated by those with whom

you associate as you feel that you ought to be. Then why trouble yourself to associate with them any longer? There are hundreds of people in London, and out of it, just as well worth knowing, and probably far more suited to be your companions, than the dukes and duchesses who appear to slight you. And last, and worst of all, you've fallen in love with a woman who led you at one time to believe that she cared for you, and now treats you as if you were a common acquaintance. Perhaps that is the most serious feature in your case, but there is no reason why it should scare you out of your senses. Do you still feel that, in spite of all her faults, Lady Alice is the object of your choice? Are you not strong enough to give her up?"

"No, Majendie, I am not," replied George. "I know her to be a flirt—I doubt if there be a spark of real feeling in her; yet I can't live without her. From time to time, also, I persuade myself that she cares for me still. You may smile, but what I tell you is the truth;

and if you saw her only once, you would believe it to be true."

"Then why don't you come to the scratch? Why don't you propose? The eldest son of Lord Belmore may surely aspire to match even with a daughter of the Duke of Preston."

"So I think when I am alone, but whenever I come into her presence my courage fails me. I had counted on the Parliamentary plan as doing everything for me, and it failed, as I have told you."

"Well, I'm a great deal too busy myself to find time for love-passages; but it seems to me that if you haven't courage to speak, you might write to her. Why not propose in a letter?"

"Because I can't write such a letter; because my pride pulls in one direction and my love in another, and I can't find words in which to express the one without outraging the other."

"By Jove! Harris, I hope it won't be so with me when I get into a similar mess. Pride,

man! What has pride to do interfering with a man's manner of making love? But, seriously, if you can't propose in writing, and feel unequal to do so by word of mouth, it seems to me that the best plan will be to combine both plans of operation. Suppose, now, you were to write to the Duke, and ask his leave to speak to his daughter about marriage: or if that course startle you, suppose you were to write both to the Duke and to Lady Alice, and explaining to papa what your object is, ask only of his daughter that she will see you at some time and place convenient to herself, on business to you of great importance. This may not be a very romantic way of doing things, but at all events it will get rid of the annoyance of being obliged to work up to a point. What say you?"

"That I thank you with all my heart for the advice. I'll act upon it the moment I get home. Yes; it has always happened that, just as I thought myself on the eve of a distinct proposal, either she has turned the con-

versation cleverly to another subject, or somebody has stepped in and interrupted us. This can't happen if she be prepared beforehand—as she is sure to be by the Duke—to hear me out. Hang it! why shouldn't I write my letters here? Give me a couple of sheets of paper, and I'll strike while the iron is hot.”

The paper was produced, and the letters written. They were both submitted to Mr Majendie, and by him criticised and amended before being handed to the groom for delivery. Perhaps our readers would like to see what sort of productions they were—letters having love for their subject, written by a lover and revised by a stranger, and that stranger a barrister-at-law. Here they are :—

“HARLEY STREET, *June 25, 1814.*

“MY DEAR DUKE,—It must have been long apparent to you that my feelings towards Lady Alice were not those of mere friendship, far less of acquaintanceship; and I hope that I may receive your sanction to offer her my hand.



My father will, I am sure, though as yet I have not consulted him, make on her whatever settlements you require. As far as you are concerned, I leave it entirely to yourself to make whatever arrangements may suit your own convenience. My ambition will be more than gratified if I can persuade her to link her fate with mine.

“I have ventured to write simultaneously to Lady Alice and yourself, though of her I have requested no more than that she will do me the great favour of naming a time and place where I may open to her a business matter of great importance.—Believe me, dear Duke, most sincerely yours,

GEORGE HARRIS.”

There was, perhaps, as much of the lawyer's as of the lover's handiwork in this epistle. The following was allowed to pass muster with scarcely a verbal alteration :—

“DEAR LADY ALICE,—The messenger who carries this to you carries also a letter to the

Duke. Of you I have only to request that you will give me an opportunity of opening my mind on a subject of great importance, at any time and in any place which may best suit your own convenience. Forgive me for adding that the sooner you can favour me with an interview, the greater the favour will be.—Believe me, sincerely yours,

“GEORGE HARRIS.”

The letters were folded, sealed, and given to the groom, with directions to carry them at once to Dorset Square, and to bring the answers to Harley Street, whither George betook himself. He did not part from his friend Mr Majendie, however, without again assuring him that the obligation conferred by his sympathy and advice could never be repaid.

“And now that we have revived our friendship, let me express the hope that it may become closer from day to day. You’ll come and see me, of course?”

“Of course I will, Harris: and if you haven’t already disposed of the office, I beg that I may have the honour of acting as your best man—your groomsman, I believe I should have said—at the wedding. May it be propitious!”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE ROUT.

THE wish, lightly expressed by Emily Harris, and still more lightly joined in by Madaline, was not slow in receiving its accomplishment. Our country friends found, on returning to Park Street, that the Duke and Duchess of Preston had left their cards, and that there accompanied the tickets an invitation to a rout which her Grace was about to give the same evening. The invitation embraced the whole party, Dr Sumner inclusive ; and, after a brief consultation, the whole party agreed to accept it.

“These things are not much in my way,” observed the Doctor ; “nor in yours neither, I suppose, Harris. But Mrs Harris and the girls

seem bent on our going, and what can we do except obey? You'll get me into very bad habits, young ladies; who knows but you may saddle me with a wife in my old age, which would not be quite convenient!"

"Certainly not for us, Doctor," replied Emily. "Commend me to a bachelor's house—there's nothing like it for spinsters. We can do as we please now, but with Mrs Sumner's eye upon us the case might be different."

"Suppose, now, I were to follow the advice which a friend gave me only the day before yesterday, and change my state, what would you say then?"

"A good deal would depend on the nature of the change, and something, perhaps, on one's estimate of the adviser. May I ask who gave you this sage counsel?"

"Surely, surely; you may go farther if you will, and ask to whom he recommended me to throw the handkerchief. Are you curious on these heads?"

"Very ; tell us all about it," replied Emily, looking bright and eager.

"Well then, it was my Lord Claud Tremenere that gave the advice. And the person for whose good graces he advised me to sue was——"

"Whom—whom?"

"Yourself, my fair Emily. What do you say to that?"

The fair Emily did not answer. The bit of badinage, such as it was, seemed to affect her, by no means as perhaps it was meant to do. She blushed, gave a constrained laugh, and allowed the subject to drop. The Doctor was too sharp-sighted not to notice the slightly-embarrassed air which passed over her, and in his secret soul he rejoiced at it. It was time, however, to dress ; and the party broke off, only that they might meet again at the dinner-table, though on the present occasion without Charles, who greatly grumbled because an engagement from which he could not escape carried him

elsewhere. But he would certainly find them out at Preston House.

A rout at Preston House was like a rout anywhere else in all its details. The first-comers looked, and probably felt, foolish and awkward. A very foolish thing to do, by the way; because somebody must be first at routs as well as at weddings, and funerals also. And the Duke and Duchess, standing at the entrance of their reception-rooms, welcomed the first-comers with the same courtesy, perhaps with a larger measure of it than they found time to lavish on any except the very *élite* of the groups that followed. But the swell of the tide is rapid on such occasions after it fairly sets in; and the buzz of many voices soon rose upon an atmosphere rendered pestiferous by the exhalations from several hundred pairs of human lungs. What of that? A crowd of very noble and distinguished persons jostled, apologised, saluted, and conversed one with another; and who that has the happiness of mixing in such a throng either thinks or cares about the air that he is breathing?

Our friends from Park Street arrived, not too early, but in time to win their way, without much struggling, into the first *salon*. Once there, their future progress was easy ; for they had only to move as others did, and to be swept gently onwards, till, by-and-by, they found themselves in a position whence they could command a satisfactory view of the whole scene. In the Doctor they found an admirable cicerone. He knew every celebrity of either sex ; and one by one, as they went and came, he pointed them out to his friends. Nor was Regy useless in his own way. Canning, Castlereagh, Lord Eldon, Peel, had all been passed in review, when two gentlemen approached, both wearing the star and ribbon of the Garter, and the garter itself at the knee.

“ Look there, Madaline ; you see two of the best officers in the army. He who smiles so good-humouredly, and might anywhere pass muster as a kindly country gentleman, is Lord Hill, as gallant a soldier as he is a kind-hearted



or a little more, was decorated with a star and ribbon, which seemed well to become his figure, and filled up at once, and without any effort on her part, a void in Emily's interest of which she had heretofore been conscious. His eye was upon her. She felt it, and the blood rushed to her cheeks. They met; and the meeting was on both sides just so far embarrassed as to imply something more than either of them expressed by word or gesture. It was Lord Claud Tremanere, who, after shaking hands with Madaline and Mrs Harris, attached himself to Emily, and appeared indisposed to seek any other companionship throughout the evening. The other new-comer was our friend Charles Harris, who made at once for Madaline, and blushed up to the eyes when he took her hand in his. On Madaline's part there was complete self-possession. She seemed scarcely to be aware that, as Lord Claud had monopolised her sister, so Charles seemed disposed to monopolise her; but there were others in the room who noticed it, and neither

of them with satisfaction. Reginald felt, he could not tell why, put out by these open advances of his cousin. He had no right to be jealous of any one—he was not jealous—how could he be? Madaline had lived with him as a sister with a brother. That was all. And standing towards her before the world as a brother, there was something worse than absurd, it was positively wicked, to be offended or hurt because other men admired her. How could they help it? Yet the manifest growth of his cousin's admiration of Madaline fretted him; and his manner involuntarily, though in the most minute degree, made this apparent. She saw in a moment that something vexed him; and fixing upon him the same sweet, almost beseeching look which she gave him at the opera, asked gently if anything was wrong. How he despised himself! how he hastened to assure her that there was nothing wrong! calling her again, as he had done before, "My Madaline," in a tone of endearment which served immediately to reassure her. No, no; it

was impossible that any human being, whatever his relations towards them might be, could fling a shadow between these two young persons.

But was no shadow coming over the group ? Yes. Lady Alice had her eye upon the whole party. She was at no loss to guess who the strangers were, seeing Charley join himself to them as he did ; and she made immediately towards them.

“ Make me acquainted with your relatives, Captain Harris,” she said, extending her hand to Charley. “ My brother appears desirous of keeping them quite to himself, and that I hold to be unfair.”

Charles could have wished the beautiful Lady Alice at Jericho, yet found it impossible either to resist her intrusion or to deny her request. Lord Claud and Emily had got a little in advance of the others ; and in a throng such as that which then surrounded them, it is no easy matter to recover communications once broken. But he formally introduced Lady Alice to his uncle and aunt, and then to his

cousins Madaline and Reginald. Lady Alice looked hard at Madaline. She seemed bent on reading her gentle character through and through ; and the expression of her own face, as the scrutinising stare prolonged itself, became unpleasant. Presently she withdrew her eyes from Madaline, and turning them upon Charley, threw into them a glance of more than ordinary animation.

“ I cannot sufficiently admire your taste,” she said, in a low whisper. “ She is most beautiful. But who is she ? She is certainly no child of the excellent divine whom you call your uncle. There is warmer blood in her veins than ever coursed through his. Besides, don’t you see that he whom you call her brother scarcely relishes your interference with his privileges.”

“ What do you mean ? ” replied Charley, almost as much amused and surprised as he was annoyed. “ I never heard that my aunt was other than a most exemplary wife. I fancy Madaline has as strong a claim upon the hus-

band of that amiable lady as upon the lady herself. Why should you doubt it?"

"I never doubt. I always make up my mind, and stick to it. Tell me, though, are you a passionate admirer of that style of beauty, because if you be, I think I can show you a richer specimen than even this? Look there! Do you see that lovely creature to whom Talleyrand is speaking? She is his daughter, and as like her mother as she can be. You have heard that curious history, I daresay? Her mother, you know, left her first husband in India for Sir Philip Francis—who, by the way, is standing near the daughter—and, getting tired of Francis, or he of her, went to Paris. There she met and captivated Talleyrand, and married him. They say the mother is as silly as she is beautiful. It's not so with the daughter. Would you like to be introduced?"

Charles could not avoid being so far interested in what he heard as to give to Lady Alice his attention for the moment. He turned his gaze in the direction to which she pointed,

and found so much to admire, that, almost unconsciously, he allowed himself to be drawn off from his relatives. He followed his fair guide into the throng, and there got jammed. It seemed as if her object had been gained, for after rallying him and herself on the awkwardness of their position, she suddenly lowered her voice, and asked whether he had made matters up with his brother.

“Oh, yes; they had quite made matters up. But why did she ask?”

“Because I wish you to save your brother, if you can, from what I fear will be a considerable mortification to him. I’m afraid that I have not behaved quite as I ought to have done. He has written to me—do you understand?—and—and—I would rather not answer his letter.”

“I am sorry to hear it—very sorry,” replied Charles. “My brother and I are not exactly as fond of each other as such near relations ought to be; but it would give me great pain if he were doomed to the mortification you

hint at. It was easy to see that he had fixed his happiness on winning your favour. Let me venture to hope that you have not quite made up your mind to reject him."

Lady Alice's countenance underwent a marvellous change of expression on hearing these words. Whatever her motive might be, she had evidently not given to Charles her confidence on so delicate a subject with any desire that he should plead his brother's cause. She looked up with a curious mixture of surprise, mortification, and even anger, in the glance which she bestowed upon him, and said—

"Your brother has infinite reason to be grateful to you. He must be very much ashamed of his rudeness the other night. He could not have been aware of the extent to which you are capable of carrying self-denial, nor was I till this moment."

Charles was startled, both by the words and by the tone in which they were uttered. He saw that she was really moved, though by what passion it puzzled him to make out, and

he would have probably made matters worse by the answer which rose to his lips, had not their *tête-à-tête* been somewhat rudely interrupted. Not unobserved by George was their position. He had seen Lady Alice make her way to the place where his brother and Madeline were standing together. He had observed the adroitness with which she contrived to separate Charles from the rest of his party, and watched them plunge into the throng, and there stand still. Perfectly indifferent to the inconvenience which he might cause to others—forgetful, also, as it seemed, of what might be due both to Lady Alice and himself—he pushed through the crowd, and reached them just as she had given utterance to the rather petulant remark quoted above.

“I had the honour, Lady Alice,” he said, without taking any notice of his brother, “to send one note to your ladyship this morning, and another to the Duke. Probably his Grace has been too much occupied with public affairs to favour me as yet with a reply. Am I to



attribute your ladyship's silence also to want of time or of inclination?"

"To whichever you please, Mr Harris," replied Lady Alice, bridling up, and looking, as she had a perfect right to be, very much offended. "I daresay you will hear from my father to-morrow. You scarcely take the proper method of extracting any reply from me."

"Am I again indebted to my amiable brother for your present coldness?" asked George.

"Your brother is a great deal more considerate of you than you are either of him or of me. I will leave him to explain, if he think it worth while, what passed between us."

These bitter words—for bitter they were on both sides—were spoken in a tone so low that they reached no ears except those for which they were intended. In such a crowd as this, indeed, few persons either hear or see, or take the trouble to analyse, what passes around them, except in their own immediate clique. Lady Alice's abrupt departure, therefore, attracted as little attention as the angry scowl

which George and Charles Harris cast upon each other. But the effect of what had been said and done upon the several actors in this little by-play was not satisfactory. Lady Alice kept aloof from both brothers during the remainder of the evening. Charles soon broke away from George, hoping to reunite himself to the party from Park Street; and George, burning with rage, made his way out of the *salons*, and went home. Charles, also, had his own annoyances to endure. He saw his friends make their way, slowly but steadily, towards the door. He strove, but did not succeed in overtaking them, even on the stairs, and reached the hall only in time to see Lord Claud lead Emily, and Reginald conduct Madaline, to their carriage. He, too, went home, disturbed and agitated.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### REVELATIONS.

GEORGE HARRIS had been unjust to the Duke of Preston. A note from that nobleman arrived at his apartments after he had gone out to dinner; and now, on reaching home a little after midnight, he found it upon his drawing-room table. He seized it fiercely, tore it open, and read as follows:—

“MY DEAR SIR” — (the Duke had uniformly addressed him as “Dear Harris” till now)—“I feel very highly the compliment you pay to me and my daughter, and so, I do assure you, does Lady Alice. No man, be his position in life what it may, can give stronger

proof of respect and esteem for a woman than by proposing to make her his wife. But, apart from the possible differences of tastes between Lady Alice and yourself, there are circumstances of a very delicate nature which lead me to believe that it was only because you overlooked, or perhaps undervalued, these circumstances, you did my family the honour to express a wish to be connected with it. I would not for the world hurt your feelings—and personally, as you know, I have a great regard for you; but, looking to the circumstances to which I have referred above, you will, I am sure, think with me that it would be better, on the whole, that you did not see Lady Alice, or repeat to her the proposal which you have been good enough to hint at in your letter to me. *I* cannot possibly object to see you, and talk the matter fully over, if such be your wish. It strikes me, however, that you will at once appreciate the motives which induce me to communicate with you, as I now do, in terms somewhat vague and

general, and consider the negotiation opened in your note as having come to nothing. Some possible awkwardness between us will thus be avoided ; and meeting, as heretofore, on friendly terms, I shall be able on all future occasions to subscribe myself, as I do now, very truly yours,

PRESTON."

George read this elaborate epistle over once, twice, thrice, and at the end of each fresh perusal found himself less able than he was before to make anything out of it. What could the pompous blockhead mean ? "Circumstances of a very delicate nature" !—what were these circumstances ? Had Charles actually stolen a march upon him ? Had he presumed to anticipate his elder brother by becoming a suitor for Lady Alice's hand ? and had Lady Alice accepted him ? Pooh ! the last idea was absurd. Lady Alice was not a person, or he greatly deceived himself, to be hurried beyond the line of prudence by passion. She might possibly—he didn't believe

she did—prefer Charles to him as a man; but she would certainly not mate with a younger son and a smaller fortune so long as an elder son, with the sure prospect of a peerage well endowed, was at her command. Or could that cursed Colonel Protheroe be in his way after all? He had seen very little of the conceited hound these two years past. Colonel Protheroe was not much at Preston House—at all events on occasions when he, George Harris, happened to be a guest there. Besides, what delicacy could there be—what “matters of a very delicate nature”—which could render it necessary even for the Duke of Preston to go about the bush and about the bush in speaking of a possible contract of marriage between his daughter and a great landed proprietor in Yorkshire? Confound the Duke! Confound his bombast, his pomposity, his affectation of diplomatic caution, in writing a letter which ought to have been simple and straightforward! Confound them all! He wished to heaven that he hadn’t been per-

sueded to take the step he did take. Majendie had proved himself a bad adviser. He wished to heaven that he had taught himself long ago to throw over a girl who evidently made a convenience of him. It was too late now, however. He had done that which could not be undone, and which should not be undone in the sense of quietly relinquishing an object which had been openly declared. No! he would see the Duke, at all events; and, if nothing more could be done, he would force him to make a clean breast of the mighty secret he took such an original and conciliatory method of hinting at. Yes! he would have a note in the Duke's hands the first thing in the morning, and, before the day closed, bring this detestable business to a wind-up. He sat down at once, and wrote thus:—

“MY DEAR DUKE OF PRESTON,—I have received your Grace's letter, which I found upon my table after returning home from Preston House.

“I have no right to press anything upon your Grace or Lady Alice contrary to the wish of either ; and a frank avowal that the proposal which I wished to make could not be received would have led to its immediate withdrawal. But there is a tone in your Grace’s communication which I can neither understand nor approve of, and I therefore write to request that more full explanation which you are good enough to offer, should I desire it.

“Not being aware of any ‘matters of very great delicacy’ that touch myself, I am naturally desirous of being informed whether my good name has been tampered with by slanderers, and if it have, to find out who the slanderers are, and to inflict on them the chastisement they deserve. I propose, unless I hear to the contrary, to wait upon your Grace to-day about noon, and to receive from you the explanation which it seems to me that I have a right to require, and which you cannot refuse to give.—I have the honour to





bloated folly of the ducal letter! Curse it—curse the writer! Hadn't he duped, played upon, made a convenience of one every way as good as himself? Old ass! old blockhead! Well, all this was at an end; he would not expose himself to the mortification of being taken up again, only to be thrown over, as he had been four years ago. And even if by flattering the vanity of the father he might hope to be recommended to the good graces of the daughter, would the chance be worth the price paid for it? Certainly it would; and on the whole he was inclined to believe that, sharp as the tone of his note was, it could do him no harm, because it was always in his power, if he found the Duke accessible during their interview, to soften down whatever asperities arose through it. On the whole, then, he came to the conclusions—first, that in writing as he did to the Duke he had only vindicated his own self-respect; secondly, that his prospects were in reality neither darkened nor rendered more

bright by what had passed between them ; thirdly, that a man of the Duke's temperament was more likely to be worked upon by the admixture of self-assertion and deference which he meant to throw into his manner at their coming interview than by any excess of the latter quality ; and, lastly, that Lady Alice was one who would take her own way, let the views of her father respecting her be what they might. As to his brother, d—n him ! he had in reality no fears on that score, and was angry with himself for being hurried, as he had twice been, into saying and doing before her what he was now heartily ashamed of. There was a strong impulse upon George, as he thus summed up his argument, to order brandy-and-water, but he resisted it. He took up a book, tried to read, found that his thoughts wandered everywhere except over the page that lay open before him ; shut it, replaced it on the shelf, and went to bed. Sleep was long of coming, but it came at last, and when his servant called him by-and-by, he rose refreshed.

The first inquiry that he made on entering his breakfast-room was about the note which he had directed to be conveyed to Preston House over night. His order, it seemed, had not been neglected. The note was gone, and his servant who carried it brought back word that his Grace, when he arrived, was still in bed, but that his Grace's valet had promised to carry up the note with the hot water as soon as his master's bell rang. The next thought that filled his mind was one of expectation. Would the Duke answer his note? and if no answer came, was he justified in concluding that the interview which he had solicited was assented to? He then opened his desk, and taking out the Duke's letter, he read it over, and—an incident very unusual with him—folding it up again, allowed his eye to rest on the superscription. It was addressed to George Harris, Esq., M.P. What did the old idiot mean by writing to him thus? Oh, he understood. Titles such as those which the Duke's daughters and younger sons laid

claim to were, like his own prefix, "the Honourable," mere terms of courtesy. And it pleased this pompous personage, in writing, or imagining himself to write, as a diplomatist, to adhere to the strictly legal designation to which his correspondent was entitled. George positively laughed aloud as he thought of this, with those short bitter laughs where-with men, half amused, half indignant, relieve their feelings. "That's your game, is it, my lord Duke?" So he thought, rather than said, aloud. "You fancy that my presumption will be a trifle taken down when I see you thus reminding me that as yet I am only a commoner, though a member of the House of Commons. You are confoundedly mistaken. Whether the Honourable or plain Esquire to-day, I may be your Grace's peer to-morrow; and, by Jove! you shall find, when we come to try issues, that I don't mean to abate one jot of my legitimate pretensions. I wonder if he will condescend to let me know of his purpose to receive me at twelve o'clock. I'm

sure I don't care a farthing whether he do or not."

George Harris misinterpreted his own feelings—he did care. He was disappointed and nervous when half-hour after half-hour passed without bringing an answer to his letter. True, he had distinctly said that, if not advised to the contrary, he should make his appearance at Preston House about noon. But then, when points are at issue which greatly interest us, we ought to be made quite sure. It would have been a satisfaction to hear from the Duke himself that he was expected. At last the clock on the chimney-piece struck the half-hour past eleven; whereupon he rang the bell and ordered his horses. They were brought out in due time, and counting the minutes till the hands of his watch pointed exactly to twelve, he descended to the street and mounted. He rode at a foot's pace, and more than once had some difficulty in conquering the reluctance which grew upon him to go forward at all. At last he reached the gate of Preston House,

and was told that his Grace was at home. His Grace had given orders that Mr Harris, on arriving, should be shown up to his own study; and up to the Duke's study Mr Harris was accordingly conducted. The Duke was seated, when George entered, at his writing-table—one of those convenient escritaires, the semicircular lids of which roll up, and on being brought down again, enclose with a spring lock whatever papers may be in use. The Duke snapped - to the lid of his escritoire, and, rising, held out his hand to his visitor, which the visitor at once accepted. It seemed, however, to George, that there was rather less of cordiality in the gripe than he had been accustomed to. He fancied, also, that the Duke's eye did not meet his with the same frank open gaze that it used to send forth. But George was himself nervous and agitated; and men who are themselves agitated and nervous are apt to fancy tokens of nervousness in others. He was invited to take a seat, and he did so.

"I am sorry, Mr Harris, that the tone of my letter displeased you," observed the Duke. "It was written, as I fancied, in such a way as would produce any feeling rather than displeasure. Let me express the hope that you forgive what was inevitable, and that you will not allow any such foolish consideration to interrupt the harmony that has heretofore existed between us."

"Your Grace speaks to me in riddles," replied George. "Displeased with you I am not—I have no right to be. But you can hardly wonder if I am displeased with those, whoever they may be, that seem to have poisoned your mind and that of your family towards me."

"My dear sir—my dear sir," rejoined the Duke, "no human being has poisoned, or made any attempt to poison, my mind or the mind of my family towards you. I have never heard you spoken of in terms which were other than becoming."

"Nay, then, I am utterly at a loss to understand your written communication. You ad-



wise me not to seek any personal intercourse with Lady Alice, because, apart from possible differences of taste between us, there are circumstances of very great delicacy which render the honour and happiness at which I venture to aspire unattainable. If no one has slandered me, if no one has spoken of me in terms other than are becoming, what may those very delicate matters be to which you allude in your letter ? ”

“ Mr Harris ! ” exclaimed the Duke in unaffected astonishment, “ am I to believe that the matters to which I referred are not known to you ? ”

“ My lord Duke, am I to believe that your Grace looks upon me as an idiot ?—as the sort of person whom it is safe for any man, be his rank what it may, to insult with impunity ? ”

“ Insult ! Mr Harris. What have I said or done that entitles you to bring such a charge against me ? ”

“ Said !—done ! Why, you refuse point-blank to let me offer to your daughter my

hand, my fortune, and the peerage which will come to me at my father's death; and you say that your refusal is the result of certain matters of great delicacy which you decline to state."

The Duke was silent for some minutes, during which he never withdrew his glance from George Harris's countenance. ' There was not a movement there that indicated distrust or misgiving. The two men stared into each other's eyes without either of them flinching, and then the Duke said,—

"This is the most extraordinary thing that I ever heard of, and to me the most distressing. I see that you have been kept in the dark, Harris; and I beg of you, as a personal favour, that you will spare me the exceeding pain of dispelling the cloud. Pray, let things rest as they are. Lady Alice cannot listen to your suit. Apart from other considerations, it is only fair to tell you that her affections are engaged. Don't ask to know more, and let the contents of my unhappy note pass out of your recollec-

tion. I much regret the mistake that has occurred."

"Your Grace may regret what you please, but no amount of regret on your part will make amends for your conduct—first, in writing a note which you wish me to forget; and, next, in refusing to explain what is ambiguous in it. Lady Alice's hand, much as I should value it, is of no value to me in comparison with the slur which you seem determined to cast on my good name. I insist upon being told what you meant when you wrote to me about matters of great delicacy."

"Sir," replied the Duke, his indignation rising at the dictatorial style of his visitor's address, "if you insist upon my telling you what you are—probably the only man in London from whom it is hidden—I must obey you. I should have been glad to escape from so disagreeable a business, but if I can't, I can't. Is it possible you don't know that you are illegitimate?"

## CHAPTER XV.

### MORE DISCLOSURES.

IF the earth had opened her mouth to swallow him up—if he had seen the heavens yawn, and fire descend to consume him—George Harris could not have been more completely paralysed than by the utterance of these words. He did not spring from his chair—he did not move a muscle. Mute, and with eyes fixed in his head, he stared upon the speaker—his form rigid, his face blanched to the paleness of death. His elbows seemed glued to the arms of the chair—his hands grasped the knobs in which they terminated—he leaned neither backwards nor forwards, but, bolt upright, like a frozen man, sat staring at the Duke.

Whatever indignation the Duke might have experienced gave way in a moment before such a spectacle. He had never witnessed anything like it in his life before. He was shocked, alarmed, and full of compassion. He rose and approached the miserable man, his manner subdued and apologetic, trying with words of kindness and sympathy to undo, if he could, the evil of which he had been unwittingly the cause. They fell upon ears that heard them not, or, hearing, did not take them in. They evoked no response—not so much as an understanding glance or a languid smile. At length, after a pause of some minutes, George Harris rose.

“You have spoken words of terrible import, my lord,” he said, in a tone perfectly calm and distinct, yet hollow and husky. “If they be untrue, what value do you set upon your own life?”

So saying, he passed the Duke by, made for the door of the room, descended the stairs, and, mounting his horse, rode off in the direction of

Harley Street. When he reached his own apartments, the servant who let him in remarked that he looked pale. His manner, however, was not different from what it used to be ; and, giving his hat and whip to the man, he walked with perfect deliberation into what he called his study. In five minutes afterwards the bell rang, and the person who answered it found him seated before his writing-table, with paper spread out before him, and a pen, which he seemed to have thrown down beside it, wet with ink, but unused.

“How many hours will it take us to reach Baddlesmere, Lewis ?”

“That will depend on how you travel, sir. Posting with a pair of horses, you may go from London to Baddlesmere in six hours. If you take four horses, you may do the journey in four hours.”

“Order four horses to be put to the chariot. Pack up a few things, such as I shall require in a couple of days, and get ready yourself, so

that we may start as soon as the carriage is ready."

"Very well, sir," replied Lewis, retiring at the same time to do his master's bidding.

"I say, Tom," observed the valet, having summoned one of the grooms into the passage, "get the chariot dusted out at once, and order four posters. We're off to Baddlesmere instant. Be quick about it—do you hear?"

"Holloa! What's up now?" asked the groom.

"Never you mind, but do as you're desired, and do it quickly. Just give me time to pack master's portmanteau and my own. I shan't be a quarter of an hour about that work."

And to that work Lewis went with a will; while the groom, desiring the helper to give the chariot a dust out, proceeded to the livery-stable and ordered the posters.

While the means of locomotion were getting ready, George Harris remained alone in his study. By little and little the numbing effect of the blow that had fallen upon him wore off,

and he awoke, so to speak, to a full consciousness of the calamity with which he was threatened. Could it be that the Duke had spoken the truth? Was this, then, the real cause of that heretofore inexplicable neglect with which he had been treated in society? Illegitimate! how illegitimate? He had often wondered why among women of her own rank his mother had no friends. But the circumstance had been all along attributed to caprice, to temper, to peculiarity of tastes on her part; it never entered into his head to conceive that there could be any other cause for it. He racked his memory, also, but failed to recall a single hint or insinuation thrown out in his presence that his mother was not what she ought to be. Not even at school, where delicacy on such subjects is unknown, had the reproach been cast in his teeth that he was a bastard. It was out of the question, therefore, to suppose that no ceremony of marriage had ever passed between his parents. Would such persons as did frequent Belmore House in the days of his



boyhood have visited the kept mistress even of a prince of the blood? And was not his mother always addressed as Lady Belmore? The Coxes, too, didn't they take to her as soon as she made advances to them? and could it be believed that a clergyman of the Church of England would himself contract, far less allow his wife and daughters to be on, friendly terms with a woman living the life which his mother must do, assuming that she had no right to the precedence which she claimed? No! He could not believe that there was the smallest foundation for the slander; and, by heavens! if the slander should prove to be baseless, should not the slanderer find room to repent it? Oh! he wouldn't give him so much as a chance for his life. He would shoot him, as he would a mad dog, wherever they next met!

But was it probable—was it possible—that a man in the position of the Duke of Preston could either invent such a story, or accept it as true, unless there were some foundation for it? Was it probable—was it possible—that the

Duke could ever repeat it to him—to him, the son of the slandered woman—unless he believed it? There was utter lack of delicacy, no doubt—there was something a great deal worse—in telling the tale at all, under any circumstances, as it had been told. The Duke had acted a cruel and unmanly part. (Mr George Harris, be it observed, could look only at one side of a question in which he himself happened to be mixed up. He was keen to notice the outrages put upon his own self-love. He never called to mind the provocation which he might have given, or the outrages offered by him to the self-love of others.) But, cruel and unmanly as the Duke's conduct had been, what right could he claim to resent and punish it, if the horrible story should, after all, be a true story? Well, he couldn't live a single day under the pressure of such a doubt, amid the agony of such a terror as was upon him then. He would go at once and demand an explanation from those who were best able to afford it. And what then? Ah! the then—

the future—must take its shape from what the present might bring forth. He could form no plans reaching farther into the unseen than this rapid journey to Baddlesmere.

He had arrived at this conclusion—if conclusion it deserve to be called—when Lewis, equipped for a journey, opened the door, to announce that the carriage was ready. George followed his man, and entered the chariot. Away the light vehicle rattled, at a smart pace, across Oxford Street, down through Portman and Grosvenor Squares, and by Vauxhall Bridge over the river. The clocks were striking two as the last of the suburbs were cleared, and the inner fringes of what was then the wide expanse of Hounslow Heath entered upon. But four hours of travel were still before him; and four hours of travel to a man who believes his fate in life to hang upon the issues which shall attend the close of a journey, seem to be interminable. He tried to read; but the characters on the page all ran one into another. He tried to sleep; but sleep refused to hang

heavy on his eyelids. He gazed out of the window, seeing, yet failing to perceive, either the wide landscape that spread itself out on either side, or the particular objects in it, past which he was sweeping with all the speed that the postboys could get out of their fleet horses. But on the darkest night the dawn breaks at last; and the longest journey has its ending. He has changed horses over and over again ere reaching the Green Dragon, where—such were the improvements introduced by Macadam into our roads—it was no longer necessary to halt for the night; and now, away with a fresh change, he hurries forward, without having exchanged so much as a word of recognition with its grey-headed landlord. And now he is upon the heath or common, four miles of which will carry him to the park gate. These miles are soon compassed, and amid the cracking of whips, the gates roll back upon their hinges. Not even here does he stoop forward to give a kindly look to the old man, who bows his head obsequiously, and used once upon a time to

groom young master's horses, and to pride himself on keeping them always in the best condition. What are such a present vision and past memory to him at this moment? They are alike swallowed up, as is every other thought, in the vague anticipation of what is coming, and of which he can form no clearer conception than that it must of necessity be terrible.

Lord and Lady Belmore dined at six; it was their usual hour in the country, and, as usual, they dined alone. They spoke little, for the most part, during the meal, and seldom sat long after its conclusion. But to-day, as it chanced, they were more than usually communicative to each other, and prolonged their *tête-à-tête* beyond the quarter of an hour, which was the utmost limit on common occasions allowed to it. Their son Charles, it appeared, had written very often of late; and every letter was filled with expressions of admiration and respect for his newly-discovered relatives. And that very morning her ladyship had received

from him a letter which interested her very deeply, and which she was desirous of discussing with her lord.

"I was not aware that your brother had two daughters," she observed. "I thought that, like his race in general, he had only two children—one son and one daughter."

"Really, we have had so little communication with Sydney of late that the exact number of his children has escaped my recollection; but what about them?"

"Nothing, except that Charley seems smitten with the younger of the two sisters, whom he describes as perfectly beautiful. She can't be at all like the Harrises, however, for he speaks of her as under the middle size, and a brunette. Have you ever seen her?"

A slight flush passed over Lord Belmore's cheek as he replied,—

"I have never seen any of Sydney's children, not even his boy. By the by, shouldn't we invite his boy, Charley's great friend, to visit us here?"

“Can we, Frank? Will he come if we ask him? Oh, I should like to ask them all, especially this angel with whom Charley seems to have fallen in love, and whose singing he describes as something heavenly. Your brother is a good Christian man, Frank. He ought to be, at least, for he is a minister of the Gospel. Would it not be possible to get him here—him and his wife, and all of them? Don’t you see the hand of God in this growing attachment between the cousins?”

“Woman!” cried Lord Belmore, unable any longer to restrain himself, “you don’t know what you say. A growing attachment between Charley and that girl! It can’t be—it shan’t be. No; I’ll have none of them about me. I’ll never consent—pooh! let me see his letter.”

Lady Belmore looked at her husband with astonishment. She had not seen him so moved—no, not since they withdrew from London. She was quite at a loss to account for his present agitation, and can’t be said to have made

an effort to do so. She gave him her son's letter, however, which he was in the act of reading when the sound of horses' hoofs and of the wheels of a carriage coming rapidly down the avenue startled them both. The windows of the room in which they sat looked out not upon the road. It was by the sense of hearing, therefore, alone, and not by that of sight, that they were advertised of the approach of visitors. But they heard distinctly enough a carriage stop, the hall bell ring, and just such a bustle in the hall itself as indicates the reception of some new arrival. They were not long kept in suspense. Without time given to warn them of his coming—without so much as his name having been announced—George opened the drawing-room door, and stood before them. He stood before them, too, dusty, and, as it seemed, worn with travel; for his countenance was cadaverous, and the light in his eye gleamed out with what struck them as unnatural brightness. They both sprang to their



feet ; and his mother, woman-like, held out her arms to receive him.

“George, my dear George, what brings you home thus suddenly?” Such was her address.

“I hope there’s nothing wrong, my boy,” observed his father. “I’m delighted to see you ; but your looks alarm me.”

“Stand back, mother,” said George ; “and before embracing me answer a plain question. Are you an honest woman ? Am I a legitimate son ?”

Prone to the floor fell that unhappy woman—prone as if shot. There she lay upon the carpet, perfectly motionless—perfectly motionless even after two servants, obeying the natural impulse of their calling, had entered for the purpose of spreading a cloth for their young master’s dinner. They started back, as well they might ; and Lord Belmore, advancing to the door, closed and bolted it,

“I hope you are satisfied with your handiwork,” he said, turning with a fierce expression

of countenance upon his son. "Scoundrel! how dared you address your mother thus?"

"Scoundrel I may be, scoundrel I probably shall become," replied George, giving back the fierce glare to his father; "but answer my question, since she seems unable to do so: and if it be answered as I anticipate, then there will be two scoundrels under this roof—whatever may be their relationship one to another."

"We are both of us acting unwisely," rejoined Lord Belmore, recovering his composure. "Help me to raise your mother, and you shall receive the information you seek."

Lady Belmore had, however, by this time recovered her senses. She rose of her own accord from the ground, and, turning upon her son a look of agony such as only mothers who have fallen can throw upon the children whom they have wronged, dropped upon her knees before him.

"Forgive me, George; forgive your father. It is too true. God forgive those who have revealed to you this terrible secret, which we

hoped to carry with us to the grave. God forgive me and him. We have sinned ; but, oh ! we have both repented in dust and ashes."

Not for one moment did there pass over the countenance of George Harris so much as the shadow of a shade of filial compassion. He held out no hand to raise her from her humiliating position. He averted his very face from her, as if she had been to him an object of loathing. On his father he threw a look of fiery indignation, while he said,—

"Am I your bastard as well as hers ? Is there no tie of marriage between you ? Speak out at once, and let me hear the worst."

"You are ungenerous ; you are unjust. There is the tie of marriage between your mother and me. There has been since long before the birth of your brother. Unfortunately, the law's delay rendered it impossible to repair the wrong that I had done before you came into the world, to be—not heretofore, I regret to say—a source either of comfort or of pride to us."

“My curse rest upon you both, and a double portion of it upon him whom you call your younger son and my brother. Brother he shall be to me no more, who have neither father nor mother nor living thing to care for or to love. Let me go, I say,” he exclaimed, as his father stepped forward and laid his hand gently on the young man’s arm. “Don’t touch me! There’s contamination in your touch! I leave your presence; you shall never see my face again!”

So saying, he made a rush at the door and endeavoured to open it. The bolt had been thrust, however, into the socket, of which he was not aware, and it resisted his utmost efforts. It is astonishing how vast is the influence upon us, even in our most excited moods, by the interposition, even temporarily, of some obstacle to a measure which we have been contemplating, and the change of thought which the effort to overcome the obstacle occasions.

“Stay, George, and hear reason,” observed Lord Belmore; “and if you care nothing for

either your mother or me, have some regard for yourself. I deeply regret the past, and would undo it if I could. I deeply regret, also, not having long ago made you aware of the unhappy circumstances from which, though no fault of your own, you suffer. But it is idle to brood over what is beyond our power. Your mother came to me from a man who was every way unworthy of her. She has been to me a far better wife than I deserved, and to you affectionate and tender, as you know. Neither she nor I have any wish to keep you against your will a member of our family. The title with the estates entailed on it must go to your brother ; but for you I have all along determined to make such a provision as should enable you to take your place in the best society that England can afford, and the deed effecting that object shall be completed with as little delay as possible. Let me entreat, even if it be only for the sake of appearances—if neither your mother's peace of mind nor mine is any concern to you—let me entreat you, now that

you are here, to remain a day or two as if no such painful discovery had been made. Do this, and when you return to London you will find that you are master of a fortune which any nobleman might envy. Don't fling yourself away because you are not, as you supposed you were, my heir-at-law, but live, as an English gentleman ought to do, on good terms with those who will always recognise in you their honoured kinsman."

George heard his father out, and having to a great extent recovered his own self-control, replied,—

"I have spoken more sternly than I ought to have done. Mother, forgive me and kiss me. I thank you, father, for what you propose to do, but I can't act as you wish. Give me a portion, a moderate portion, of what you can spare from the title—the dignity of that must be upheld—and I will seek in a distant land, perhaps in one of our own colonies, that position to which it is impossible that I can now attain here. Let this be the compact

between us, and I will remain at Baddlesmere till the arrangements are completed. Does this content you?"

"My son, O my son!" cried Lady Belmore, now falling into his arms, and kissing him passionately, "do not desert me in the evening of my days. What I have suffered only God and myself can tell. Don't add to the burden which I must carry about while I live by quitting the country and going where I shall never see you more."

"Be content, mother—be content. I am your son for a season at all events. May no worse evil ever overtake you than your severance from such an abject and outcast as I."

We need not pursue this portion of our history farther. The little party which met under circumstances so harrowing gradually regained their composure. Even Charley's letter, with his glowing account of Madaline, was forgotten; and the servants finding, when the bell rang again, that Mr George was ready for his dinner,

laid it in the persuasion that her ladyship had only been taken with a fit, and was herself again. At all events, if any other suspicions entered into their minds, they gave no expression to them except in the servants' hall.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE GROWTH OF LOVE.

THREE weeks have passed since the occurrence of the incidents described in the previous chapter. They proved to be, for our friends from Devonshire, a season of unmitigated enjoyment. Other *salons* than those of the Duchess of Preston were thrown open to them ; and whatever was to be seen throughout London in the way of sights, or heard in the guise of sweet sounds, they saw and heard continually. On all such occasions Charles Harris was their inseparable companion. Wherever they dined, he dined ; wherever they showed themselves in ballroom or gallery, he bore them company. They were

presented at Court; so was he. They rode in the parks; he rode with them. His zeal in serving them all never grew slack; but to one above all the rest his devotion became day by day more marked and absorbing. It seemed as if the air he breathed sustained life in him only because Madaline breathed it also. He grew, so to speak, into her shadow. Not that a syllable ever escaped him, in all their intercourse, of love, or even of passionate admiration. The feeling that moved him seemed to be too deep for words. It made him regard her as the pious Roman Catholic regards the image of the Virgin, as something too sacred to be approached except in an attitude of adoration. It was not now with him as it had been either when the fair Lucy caught his boyish fancy, or when Lady Alice laboured to fling her net over him and wellnigh succeeded. In both of these instances he could speak freely enough tender words, and show himself impatient if tender words were not spoken in return. Now the

atmosphere which surrounded the object of his idolatry was, in his eyes, so sacred, that he could not venture to disturb its holy calm by any reference to human passions. Was Madaline indifferent to all this? Did she fail to observe it? No; she was neither indifferent nor unobservant. But the only feeling which it awakened in her was one of real sorrow. Young as she was she perfectly understood two grave truths: first, that her cousin had given to her the rich treasure of an honourable love; and next, that she had no love to give him in return. Perhaps it was this bitter consciousness that threw into her manner, at times, a touch of tenderness which overwhelmed him quite. For true women are very gentle towards men whom they cannot love, so long as these, loving with all their hearts, refrain from telling in words what their manner sufficiently indicates. It is only after the word has been spoken, often rashly, usually out of time, that the same generous nature constrains them

to become cold, and if need be repulsive. Charles, by what instinct guided it might be hard to say, appeared to be aware of the exact state of the case between Madaline and himself. He saw that to his society she preferred that of no other man except her brother only; yet he failed to see such preference for his own as encouraged him to hope that as yet she was disposed to give him more than the friendship of a near and dear kinswoman.

Meanwhile another attachment took root and grew apace between Lord Claud Tremanere and Emily Harris. It might be the same in its essence with that which Charley yearned to lavish upon Madaline; but it sprang from a different soil; it was watered by different showers; it sent forth its shoots quickly and healthily, and bore fruit. Dr Sumner had seen its first beginnings, and out of truest friendship for both parties promoted it by every means in his power. And now he and his friend the Rector of St Botolphs are met in

the Doctor's consulting-room to talk over what they had equally observed, and to consider how it behoved them to act under the circumstances.

"As far as Madaline is concerned, you need give yourself no uneasiness at present, Harris. I know women better than most men, and I could stake my existence on her being as yet fancy-free so far as Charley is concerned. But for him my heart bleeds."

"I believe you are right, Sumner. Yet the very thought is awful. What can we do to get the poor youth out of the fire before it consumes him?"

"If the worst comes to the worst, you must tell him the truth. It may kill him if told now; but better that than see him go mad, as he will certainly do, if the discovery break upon him, possibly after, perhaps, by perseverance, he has prevailed upon Madaline to promise him her hand."

"That she will never do. You may know the sex; I know the individual. She has as

surely given her affections to Reginald, as he, unconsciously to himself, has given his to her ; and her mother's daughter is not likely either to love by halves or to prove inconstant."

"If you be sure of that, perhaps your best plan will be to let the poor youth know, in some indirect way, that Madaline is engaged. You can easily find an opportunity of doing so when Emily's engagement to Lord Claud comes to be spoken about. Meanwhile, though, ought we not to look a little more into her affairs? You would like to see again the document which we read so cursorily that night, would you not?"

"Yes, surely. And yet, my dear Sumner, it goes to my heart to be the means of delivering such a blow as the disclosure of what we believe to be the truth must inflict upon that lad. I care nothing for the father, nor the mother, nor for the elder brother ; indeed he, as you are aware, would lose nothing by it. But poor Charley, Reginald's bosom friend, and one whom we have had about us like a

child of our own ever since we made his acquaintance,—how cruel it seems to rob him of his rights !”

“ His rights, Harris ? Think of the rights of your own son ; think of the debt that is due to the orphan whom you have reared so tenderly.”

“ It is so. You are more just than I. Regy’s rights I might postpone, but hers I cannot. Have you got the packet ?”

The Doctor had received the packet from Gordon’s the day before, and now produced it. Seventeen years had run their course since Mr Harris last saw that packet, and they had wrought upon it their customary effects. The colour of the envelopes was darkened, the superscription was faded ; the two seals had become flattened and blanched. They broke the seals and took from the envelope the document which it covered. It was a short letter written in French, and addressed to Mademoiselle Madaline de la Fontaine. It ran thus:—

“ MY DEAR MADEMOISELLE DE LA FONTAINE,

—My friend and pupil has shown me your beautiful letter, and desired me for his sake to answer it. He told you only the truth. A marriage ceremony performed by me, who am a priest of the Church of England, would be, in England, whither you must eventually go, quite as binding as one performed by M. le Comte's chaplain. It was solely with a view to avoid publicity, which, circumstanced as Francis is with his father, would be ruin to him, that he made the suggestion to which you object. But if you feel that Father Jerome can be trusted, your word is law to him. We shall be in the chapel to-night, at the hour named by you, I need hardly say on his part how gratefully. I beg of you to receive the tokens of my perfect consideration and respect,

“THOS. BRACKENBURY.”

“As far as it goes,” observed Mr Harris, after reading this document twice over, “nothing can be more explicit than this. My brother, having received my father's positive



command to think no more of poor Madaline, proposed a clandestine marriage; and probably in good faith, for I acquit him of evil intentions then, assured her that Brackenbury, being a clergyman, was competent to perform the ceremony. Whether Brackenbury lent himself to the delusion, or to the deceit rather—or whether he merely wrote as he did to vindicate the good intentions of his pupil—we don't know. Nor does it signify. Madaline was too noble to consent to what would have been a false step in her own country, and George, unable to give her up, makes her his wife in the chapel of her father's château. Can we prove all this ? ”

“ Not unless we can persuade Brackenbury to speak out,” replied the Doctor ; “ and you know the man well enough to be aware that there is little chance of his being prevailed upon, by any considerations of moral right, to bring discredit on himself, and wreck the good name of his patron, if he can avoid it.”

“ We must try that course, however, if other

means fail us ; but not now. In fact I don't see my way to anything more at present. Besides, I doubt the wisdom of showing this cruel matter up till after Emily's affair comes off. A scandal and a wedding wouldn't go well to-gether in the same family."

"Be it so, Harris ; only let me entreat you to guard against the weakness which would for ever allow 'I will' to wait upon 'I would.' You have a duty to perform to your own son ; and you must perform it, be the consequences to the rest of the world what they may. Meanwhile, do you adhere to your determination of returning into Devonshire next week ?"

"Yes. Lord Claud and Emily have known each other only a very short time. I have consented to the engagement ; but it was on the understanding that the marriage should be deferred till spring. We are now in the beginning of July. In April next they can marry, if they both remain at that time in the same mind ; and the ceremony may take place, since you wish it to be so, from your house. We

have all enjoyed our present long visit too much not to be desirous of repeating it."

And is this all that the reader is to be told of the loves of Lord Claud Tremanere and Emily Harris? Yes, this is all. When gentlemen on the shady side of forty set their affections on girls of twenty-one or twenty-two, they offer them, it may be, a less sparkling gift, but a far richer and surer treasure than could have come to them from youths nearer their own age. In early life men love often; in the maturity of their days once, and once only. And if their passion then seem to be less vehement, less overmastering than that of younger men, it is far more deep—it never changes. We believe also that a woman's love is, under no circumstances, so generous and self-denying as when she gives it with all her soul to a man double her own age. Much more than passion, much more than fancy and caprice, moves her then. She becomes elevated in her own esteem when satisfied that she has won the devotion of a matured intelligence as well as of a generous heart. Proud of her lover far more than of

herself—proud with that truest pride which finds delight in doing honour, and desires that everywhere else honour should be done to him whom she regards as the first of human beings—she thus loses, so to speak, her identity in him ; she is his—she has ceased to be her own. And not unlike, though in its mode of operation very dissimilar, is his joy, rather than his pride, in the conquest which he has achieved. The love of man in youth is selfish ; it is of the earth, earthy. The love of man in mature age looks ever to the wellbeing of her on whom it is set, and is prepared to make every sacrifice provided only it tend to promote that end. Therefore it is rarely demonstrative. And hence it comes to pass that of all that may have occurred between Lord Claud Tremanere and Emily Harris in moments when the outer world was dead to them and they to it, no record has been preserved. Theirs was a true love, yet its course ran smooth. They were engaged, and happy in the engagement, with the cordial concurrence of friends and relatives on both sides.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### MORE REVELATIONS.

It was settled that the Harrises were to quit London on the third day subsequently to the conversation adverted to above. The Doctor, by way of sending them home in good spirits, had invited a select party to meet them at dinner the evening previous to their departure; and among the guests bidden were, as might be expected, both Lord Claud Tremanere and Charley Harris. It had been arranged also that, escorted only by those two gentlemen, Mr Harris, his son, and the three ladies should spend the morning in Richmond Park, to enable them to effect which purpose the carriages were ordered to be in readiness at twelve o'clock. Long before the stroke of

twelve, however, Charles Harris was announced. He looked troubled and anxious ; and after a few moments spent in conversing with the circle which still sat round the breakfast-table, he begged his uncle to give him a private interview. They withdrew together at once into a well-furnished library, which had been assigned to Mr Harris as his peculiar sanctum, and sat down together on a sofa.

“I have got a letter from Baddlesmere this morning, uncle,” said Charles, “which gives me great pain. They want me to go down immediately. George, it seems, is going abroad ; and if I don’t reach him to-night, I may not see him before he starts. Now I don’t care whether I see him or not. He and I are very little like brothers—that you must have seen ; and if we were, his going abroad does not seem to impose upon me the disagreeable duty of leaving you all an hour sooner than is absolutely necessary. Let him go. He’ll return again by-and-by ; and then we’ll see quite enough of each other.”

"True, Charley ; but if your father and mother have set their hearts on having you both with them before he goes, you must not allow any thought of us to interfere with their wishes. You must go, my boy, however disagreeable the arrangement may be to yourself. We shall be very sorry to part with you, but it can't be helped."

"Yes," replied Charley; "but there's another matter which troubles me more than even that. Uncle, uncle ! it's no use trying to hide from you what I fancy I must have said in writing to my mother. To part with Madaline will kill me. I can't live without her ; and my father positively forbids my ever speaking on the subject either to her or to him. O uncle ! won't you be my friend, and speak to both for me ?"

Not unprepared to receive, sooner or later, from Charles himself, the confidence which the poor lad seemed to have given, inadvertently in the first instance, to his mother, Mr Harris experienced a sensation of positive relief on

learning that Lord Belmore had taken the lead in denouncing a proposal, the bare anticipation of which had for some time past filled him with horror. It was not, however, strong enough to diminish in any degree the extent of his great sorrow for his nephew. In it, indeed, for the moment, every other consideration seemed to be lost. He cast upon the unhappy youth a look of deep sympathy, and, taking him in his arms, embraced him. Charley laid his head upon his uncle's shoulder, and wept like a child.

"My poor boy, my poor boy!" Mr Harris at length said, "don't give way so. Hold up like a man. Bitter as the trial is, you must learn to bear it. There are reasons, of which as yet you are ignorant, why your father's will should in this instance be rigidly obeyed. You must go at once, and set off by the twelve o'clock coach."

"But, uncle," replied Charley, suppressing his tears, "I have a letter from my mother also; and she bids me not take what my father



has written as his final judgment. She says that he was very angry when he first heard of the state of my feelings, but that he has become much softened of late. He still declares to her that he can never allow the marriage; but it is in sorrow now, not in anger. And she argues from this that when he sees how entirely my life is bound up in Madaline, he will withdraw his objections in the end. Indeed she goes so far as to say that, if you were to write to him or see him, he would do whatever you advised."

"I know your father, Charley, better than even your mother does," answered Mr Harris. "I am quite sure that on this point he will never surrender his views to those of anybody else. And I could not urge him to do so, my boy. You would not, I am sure, wish me, circumstanced as I am, to plead with your father against his own deliberate judgment."

"But it is not his deliberate judgment. It can't be. How could it? He has never seen Madaline. He hasn't seen you for many years,

nor my aunt at all. How can his deliberate judgment enter into this refusal at all? It is mere caprice—mere prejudice.”

“No, Charley, no. It is neither caprice nor prejudice. Though he may not have seen your aunt at all, nor me for many years, he is perfectly aware that a marriage between you and Madaline could not be other than a misfortune to all concerned. And he will never change his opinion, depend upon it. I know how easy it is to say, give up the dream of your youth; how very difficult to do it; but done it must be, my boy. You’ll never marry Madaline; no, nor even speak to her of marriage.”

“Not speak to her of marriage, uncle! Are you, too, my enemy? What have I done to deserve that you should cut me off from the only hope that holds out to me the remotest chance of happiness?”

“You have done nothing, Charley—nothing, as far as I know, to deserve other from me than my warmest affection. I am not your enemy, God knows. And God knows also that, if it

were possible to promote your happiness in any way, I would move heaven and earth to do so. But you are not seeking your own happiness now. Besides, I have reason to believe that Madaline's affections are engaged."

"Oh, uncle, uncle," cried Charles, bitterly, "don't tell me that! Say whatever you please about my father's obstinacy and your own determination not to sue to him, even for the happiness of his son. But don't tell me that Madaline's affections are engaged. If you cut me off from all hope in that way, I had better lie down and die."

"Not so, Charley; that would be unmanly and mean. Let the whole matter stand over for the present. I can't retract what I've said, because I believe it to be true. But why should you dwell upon it? We can do nothing—that I repeat to you—unless your father consent. And I must require of you to give me your honour that, till you have obtained your father's consent, you will never say one word to Madaline on the subject we

have been talking about. Go at once to Baddlesmere. Don't even trust yourself to take leave of the rest; but hurry home, pack your portmanteau, and catch the first coach that starts for Baddlesmere. Write to me at St Botolphs the result of your conference with your father; and mind—whatever your own feelings may be—if you desire to 'retain my good opinion, and the good opinion of all of us, show yourself an obedient and loving son. And now farewell, my boy, and God bless you. No; don't go into the drawing-room at all, but hurry off to Belmore House. Otherwise you'll be too late."

So saying, Mr Harris accompanied his nephew to the hall door, let him out, and closed it after him. He returned to the rest of his party with an expression on his face which only Dr Sumner understood.

"You're not quite yourself, Harris," said the Doctor, "and I'm rather glad of it. There's nothing much amiss with you, but enough to justify me in advising you to let the young

people go, under the care of Mrs Harris, to Richmond Park this morning. I have some business on hand about which I want to consult you before you leave town. And I doubt whether we should find time if you held to your resolution of lunching abroad."

The three young people looked anxious, and expressed great reluctance to leave their father behind. Mrs Harris was perfectly satisfied with the arrangement. She, equally with the Doctor, guessed at least the substance of what had passed between her husband and nephew, and was not sorry that the two gentlemen should discuss it together. When, therefore, the carriages arrived, Lord Claud making his appearance with one of them, a slight change in the distribution of the occupants became necessary. Mrs Harris shared Lord Claud's barouche with Lord Claud and Emily; Reginald and Madaline went together in the Doctor's chariot. It would be hard to say in which of the two vehicles the larger measure of pure happiness reigned.

Meanwhile Charles, getting upon his horse, rode back at a rapid rate to Belmore House. The few preparations which he considered it necessary to make were soon complete; and, just in time to catch the coach before it started, he arrived at the booking-office and secured a place. His arrival at Badlesmere seemed to have been expected; for at the gate next to the common a gig awaited him, and in that he drove home. The dressing-bell was ringing as he alighted at the hall, and his mother only waited to receive him and take him into her arms. He was quite at a loss to account for the intense emotion which she displayed in meeting him. He knew that whatever her faults might be, lack of affection for him could not be mentioned among them; and he would not have been surprised had the thought of the state of his feelings, and of the resolution which his father had come to concerning him, operated to throw more than a usual amount of tenderness into her manner. But the agony of weeping

with which she clung to him seemed so much greater than the occasion required that he was as much surprised as moved by it.

"What is it, mother? What has happened to cause all this? It's not about me that you are distressing yourself so, is it? Cheer up, mother, dear mother; you'll break my heart if you go on like that."

She could not answer him. She could only renew the embrace, dry up her tears, and bid him make haste and dress. He did so, and, just as the dinner-bell rang, met his father and George in the drawing-room—the former looking pale and careworn, more so than Charley had ever seen him do before. The latter was grave, and, as it seemed to Charley, very much softened, and therefore in his manner very much improved. Both shook hands cordially with the new-comer, and the dinner was announced.

While the servants were in attendance little conversation passed at that dinner of four. Scarcely were the healths of the other branch

of the family inquired after ; and of the Duke and his set not a word was said. But when a fresh bottle of claret was placed upon the table, and the butler had withdrawn, the ice gave way. Lady Belmore made as if she would have quitted the room. George detained her, not, as he would have done in other days, harshly and severely, but by a gentle pressure of his hand on her own, and a kind look.

“Don’t go, mother. We shall never be more perfectly alone than we are now. Let me tell Charley all about it, and do you command yourself. Why not, dear mother ? it’s all for the best. You know how often you used to say to me, long ago, that the idlest of all things is to cry over what is beyond our reach. There, now—there’s a good soul ; don’t cry. Charley,” he continued, looking across at his brother, “I’ve often behaved like a bully to you ; I’ll never do so again. You are the heir to the title and estates. I am your brother, but—not—legitimate.”



“Good God, George!” cried Charley, jumping up, “what do you mean?—what are you saying?”

“Only God’s truth, my boy; and, being true, you and I must receive it in all submission. It seems cruel to my mother that I should be the spokesman on the occasion, and speak out now; but she yielded the point—God bless her!—because I pressed it; and I pressed it because I was anxious to convince you all, before we part, that I carry away with me not one spark of animosity to any of you—but the reverse. Charley, that happened in their case which has happened in the cases of many others. Our mother had married a man who behaved to her like a brute. Our father took her from him; and before there was time to get the divorce I was born. You, therefore, are the future Lord Belmore. I—a man without even a name.”

“Oh mother—oh George—oh father—can all this be so?”

“It is all true, my boy,” replied Lord Bel-

more, restraining his emotions with great difficulty. "It is all true, and ought to have been made known to you both long ago. But your mother and I put off the evil hour from day to day. Now it has come upon us with tenfold darkness; for George positively refuses to remain in England. He leaves us to-morrow for the Cape."

"My brother!—my brother! do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Charley, coming round, and flinging his arms round George's neck. "Stay with us. Be the representative of the family still. Surely, means may be found to redress this wrong, which, after all, is not so very bad. And if not, my father will take care that your portion more than equals mine; won't you, father?"

"I have told him so, over and over again, Charley; and I did so with the greater confidence, that I knew you would approve of my dispositions. I was willing, but he would not consent."

"No, father; no, Charley. All the wealth

of the Indies would not reconcile me to what has come to pass, if I got it on condition that I must remain in England. My mind is quite made up. I should be to all of you, and especially to my poor mother, a living and constant reproach. I could not look in the face those whom I treated too much *de haut en bas*. A life of idleness would be to me a life of misery, for the only woman whose presence could lighten it spurns me. Let me go my own way. It is best for us all."

And his own way George Harris went. He had already agreed to accept from Lord Belmore a sum of twenty thousand pounds as his portion. He had busied himself, for a month past, in providing and forwarding to the seaside agricultural implements of all kinds, as well as sheep and cattle for breeding. They were all on board a vessel which Lord Belmore had mainly freighted for him; and on the morrow, without bidding his family farewell, he there joined them. George Harris lived to be one of the most enterprising and successful of

all the emigrants who struck root in South Africa, and made it their home. He changed his name, it is true. He had taken his passage as John Smith, and as John Smith he purchased his allotment. But whenever the family at Baddlesmere and St Botolph's read in the newspapers of the successful operations of Mr John Smith as a landowner—as often as they found it reported of him that he was spreading civilisation and even morals around him, they rejoiced in the knowledge, which they alone possessed, that George Harris was the author of it all.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PARTINGS.

THE day of which we have given the record as it affected one section of the characters in our drama, was to another section fruitful in very mixed emotions. The picnic at Richmond Park went off to admiration. How could it do otherwise? Lord Claud was Emily's guide through dell and grove, pointing out each feature of the glowing landscape on which the wanderer, who reaches the terrace and lingers there, looks down; and Reginald's whole soul poured itself out in a thousand little nameless ways before her whom he could no longer regard as a sister. Did she not recognise this change of manner in the altered tone of

voice in which he was beginning to speak to her ? Did not her own heart bound and flutter as the hidden thought expanded itself. "I am not his sister, thank God ! I would not be his sister for the universe." Yes, all this is so. A feeling, not more holy, perhaps, but far more engrossing than that of brotherhood, had mastered them both. Both were alive to the realities of their situation ; he after his fashion, she after hers. And both were content with the consciousness of perfect happiness, not seeking, by word or deed, to analyse its nature. But with all this was mixed up a tinge of sadness, because they knew that they could not much longer be together. Reginald's leave would expire within a day or two of that fixed for the return of Mr Harris's family into Devonshire ; and, considering the distance to be travelled, and the time required in those days to perform so long a journey, it was considered best that he should not go with them into the country. The prospect of to-morrow's parting threw, therefore, a shadow over the enjoyment of the

evening, though there was little or no bitterness in it ; because the secret of each was safe in the other's keeping, and both were aware that the severance would only be for a season.

More than one severance came to pass on the morrow. Between these two young people it was very sad ; between Lord Claud and Emily just so far painful as it is painful to lose sight of a beloved object, if it be only for a day. Lord Claud made no display of his emotions ; and Emily's natural tears were soon dried after she got into the carriage. How it fared with Reginald and Madaline our readers must imagine for themselves, as well as take account of the feelings with which Mr and Mrs Harris refrained as much as possible from appearing to notice the poor girl's agitation, while they tenderly soothed it. For the business of this history lies for the present with Lord and Lady Belmore, and with him whom we may now consider as their only son. Theirs was a condition greatly to be pitied throughout the day that witnessed the departure of George.

They had embraced him for the last time, and they knew it. He was to be to them from henceforth as if he had never been, because it was an article in his strange treaty with them, that till he wrote nobody should write to him, nor even send him messages. Nor were they permitted so much as to gaze on him as he passed out of his old home, or to watch the vehicle that carried him from them recede into distance and disappear. He bade them good-night at bedtime just as if they were to meet again at breakfast in the morning, and when the morrow came he was gone. He had given secret directions for a postchaise to be at the door very early, and in that he departed.

Lady Belmore being informed of what had occurred, went to bed again, and never quitted it all that day. Lord Belmore moved about the house, wandering into George's room a dozen times at least, and wandering out of it again without speaking. As to Charley, the last blow had so completely deadened the effect of the blow which preceded it, that for a time



his own particular sources of anxiety ceased to trouble him. He sought his mother in her chamber; sat by her bedside, and by every kind word and gentle attention that he could think of endeavoured to divert her out of her agony. He was only very partially successful. To Lord Belmore he attached himself when his lordship went abroad; and, pretending to take interest in matters of woodcraft and farming, tried to divert his thoughts also into a new channel. Very amiable, and much to be commended, are strivings such as these. They, like charity—are they not charity?—are doubly blessed. Yet at the beginning of a great sorrow they perhaps work greater good to the giver than to the receiver. Certainly Charles Harris benefited much from his labour of love. In the contemplation of the anguish of others he forgot his own for a time. But the fiercest anguish—when we know it to be irremediable—wears itself out by degrees, and becomes, for the most part, manageable within a shorter space of time than outsiders sometimes regard as be-

coming. Lord and Lady Belmore made a great effort to calm themselves, and they succeeded. It was necessary—at least they thought so—to hide from the servants and their neighbours the real cause of their distress ; and this they could hope to do only by returning as soon as possible to the ordinary habits of their existence. Lady Belmore did not pretend to account to Louise for what she had done or said on the day of George's departure. She got up at her usual hour the day after, and went about her household duties, such as they were, much as she was accustomed to do. She was even more than usually diligent, also, in visiting the sick and the poor, and she called at the vicarage, where she sat a good half hour. “ Yes, it was perfectly true that Mr Harris had left them. He was taken with a vehement desire to travel, and had given so much attention, of late, to colonial affairs, that it would not surprise either Lord Belmore or herself if it ended in his becoming himself a colonist. Lord Selkirk, Mr Cox might recollect, had been taken long ago

with a similar passion, and sacrificed his position at home in order to found a family in America. And if George remained in the same mind in which he was now, probably he might do the same thing. At all events his absence would, she was sorry to say, be a protracted one; and though it was selfish in her to grieve over what conduced to his happiness, she really could not help it." It was thus that she spoke to the Coxes; and in this tone, also, the conversation of father, mother, and son ran, while the servants were by to overhear them. But when the doors were shut they avoided the subject as much as their feelings would allow; and so by little and little acquired strength to face it as became them. In the end the grief, though still great, had become heavy and enduring, rather than keen.

And what was the effect upon Charley of this gradual subsidence of the domestic sorrow? The gradual revival of his own, till it regained, ere long, all its original bitterness, and refused any longer to be kept down. His manner, both to

Lord and Lady Belmore, changed. Towards his father he became, day by day, more reserved, more distant. He was more frequently with his mother, making himself her companion outdoors as well as in. Is it necessary to explain the reason for these things, or to give a specimen of what passed between him and his mother in such conferences? Here is one such specimen, which may supply the reason that is asked for.

“But why should he object, mother? Surely, though he and my uncle have quarrelled, he cannot wish these private differences to grow into a blood feud. I tell you, mother, that unless Madaline become my wife I shan’t remain in England, whether I do as George has done or not.”

“Have patience, Charley, and don’t do any rash thing, nor form any rash or foolish resolution. Your father is not to be spoken to at this moment on the subject. I only hinted at it yesterday, and his answer was so determined, and the effect upon him so dreadful, that no-

thing would induce me to open the subject to him again. Wait till the bitterness of your brother's departure is over and I may try him again. But to harass him with what I know can only irritate and distress him, I can't do anything of the sort now, Charley, and you must not ask me."

"Mother, mother, you don't know what you are both doing. Is it your wish to lose both your sons? Won't you let him know that, if his mind is made up, so is mine. I won't live without Madaline."

"Charley, you'll break my heart. Haven't I proved to you that whatever mother can do for her son I will do for you? Only wait. Wait till time and reflection work upon him. Depend upon it that you are safe in my hands. I will watch for my opportunity, and whether it come soon or late I'll seize it. Where are your friends now?"

"They've gone back into Devonshire. Your letter brought me away from them the day

before they were to leave town. They are at home long ago."

"I'm glad of it, Charley, for your sake. Now, don't look so angry. I am not supposing that a short separation will have any effect in changing your feelings; but I *am* glad that, for a while at least, you will be shut out from her society. Away from her you will be better able to exercise prudence and listen to reason than if you were to see her every day."

"Well, mother, if you won't speak to Lord Belmore, I will. I should have been glad to save both him and myself the pain of a downright quarrel; for a downright quarrel it will be, if he persist in saying that he'll never consent. I couldn't stand that—I couldn't indeed."

"Oh, Charley, don't quarrel with your father. Think of all the sorrows he has borne already. Think of me, too—though God knows I deserve far less than he to be thought of; and don't render the evening of our days so dark that we shall wish to be out of it."

"Mother, mother, don't put the matter so, but suggest something for me to do — some way by which, without giving all that pain either to him or you, I may be freed from a load of sorrow too heavy for me."

"God forgive you, Charley; you are becoming my tempter. I can't bear to see you thus. I know that what I'm going to say is wrong. But if you really cannot live without Madaline, why not marry her first, and trust to the natural kindness of your father's heart, and to whatever influence I may have over him, to be forgiven afterwards."

"Oh, mother, how glad I should be to act on your suggestion if it were possible. Do you fancy that the thought now expressed by you has not occurred to myself? Yes, over and over and over again. But the thing can't be done."

"Why not?"

"Because I have given my honour to my uncle not to speak to Madaline of marriage till my father consent; and because I am quite sure that, if I were to disregard that obligation,

Madaline would never listen to my proposal. No, mother, no. You don't know these people. You don't know Madaline as I do. They would die—she would suffer any amount of torture rather than do that of which her high principle disapproves. So that won't help me, mother. Have you any other counsel in store?"

"None, my poor boy—none whatever. But I'll tell Lord Belmore what you have just told me. I don't think it possible that he can persevere in forbidding you to connect yourself with a family so honourable, and they his own nearest relatives."

"God bless you, mother dear! Go and tell my father all this and as much more as may occur to you. For you cannot speak too highly of their honour—of the honour of the whole of them, from my uncle to Madaline and Reginald. You may say, what is true, that I spoke to my uncle on the subject; and that, having first, like my father, declared that on no consideration would he allow it, he relented, like a true Christian man, and added,



that not till I had received Lord Belmore's consent could he allow the subject to be renewed to him or opened to Madaline. If, after that, my father persist—but he can't persist after that—I am sure he can't."

Lady Belmore sought her lord as soon after the above conversation with her son as the convenient opportunity offered. She told her tale in a straightforward and womanly manner; not even concealing from her husband the part which she had herself played in the business, and praying him to reconsider his decision. He looked at her with a gaze which, at first fierce and angry, melted by degrees into pure anguish. His pale cheek grew livid; and it seemed for a moment as if his senses would leave him. By a strong effort, however, he recovered himself, and then said, speaking very slowly, and, as it seemed, with difficulty—

"Augusta, never touch upon that subject to me again. The thing that you propose is impossible. That girl can never be Charley's wife; and if, in consequence of this, my un-

alterable resolve, Charles do anything rash—God's will be done!—I can't help it."

Nothing passed that evening between Lady Belmore and her son on the subject of his marriage. She made a thousand excuses to avoid being alone with him; and, though he fretted and fumed, she managed still to put him off, till the time of retiring to bed arrived. Next day there was weeping and wailing in the house. Lord Belmore had been smitten in the night with paralysis; and the servant that came to call him found him speechless. He still lived, however; and as fast as horses could carry messengers, the ablest medical practitioners in all the country round were called in. Their decision was, that his lordship had sustained a severe shock; that, his natural constitution being good, he might possibly survive it; but that the only chance for his life was to keep him quite quiet, and especially free from agitation. Poor Charley! there was an end, for some time at least, to the forlorn hope which he had taught himself to encourage.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### ANTICIPATIONS.

DAYS and weeks passed before there could be said to be any improvement whatever in Lord Belmore's condition. Slowly he regained just strength enough to be raised and dressed. He perfectly recognised all that passed round him; indeed, his intellect appeared never to have been much affected; but the power of speech was gone, and, as the doctors feared, gone irretrievably. It was suggested to Charley that he ought, under such circumstances, to retire from the army, and give his whole time to the management of the affairs of the family. And if he had seen the most remote hope of being able, when so employed, to get his father's consent

to the one arrangement on which his heart was set, Charley might have come into the project. But of this there was no hope ; and besides that he really liked his profession, and desired to rise to distinction in it, there was that in his relations with home, more especially after recent events, which quite indisposed him to throw himself upon it altogether. And farther than this, though it might doubtless be in his power to vary the monotony of rural life by visits to town, and even by succeeding his brother in the representation of Old Scratchum, even these occurrences, as he well knew, could not draw him out of himself. No ; it was clear that he must not think of Madaline more during his father's lifetime. He would endeavour, therefore—not to forget her, for that he neither could nor would try to do—but to keep the thought from running away with him entirely by such occupation as his profession supplied. So long as Lord Belmore lay, vibrating, as it were, between life and death, the Horse Guards were very considerate. His leave was pro-

longed from time to time, till it carried him well into the winter, and then, having seen his father so far restored as that he could be wheeled about the house and out into the garden, he prepared to return to his duty. His regiment was quartered in Ipswich; and to Ipswich he made ready to go, greatly to his mother's sorrow, which was the more acute, because there was little chance of his being allowed to return to her again, unless it were for a single week at Christmas, for many months to come.

"You'll not forget me when I'm gone, mother." So he said to her the evening previous to his departure. "I don't mean that," interrupting her very natural asseveration that a mother never could forget her son; "but you'll bear in mind what I've said over and over again—that if I can't marry Madaline, there's nothing for me in the world worth living for. You'll watch my poor father's humours; and if at any moment he seem disposed to relent, you'll strike while the iron's hot."

"Of course I will, Charley; but don't, I pray of you, delude yourself with idle hopes. Your father will never consent to your marriage with Madaline while he lives. It was my pressing the point that made him as he is."

"Well, mother, if it must be so it must. But my father's very ill; I don't think it's possible he can hold out long. God forbid that I should wish him dead! but remember that I don't mean, in the event of anything happening to him, to hold myself bound by what may be his last injunctions."

"Oh, Charley! don't speak so cruelly. It is terrible to me to hear you refer to your father's death as something which you contemplate with satisfaction. It is terrible to hear you declare beforehand that you don't mean to respect his last wishes."

"Mother, I will respect every wish of his, be it his last or first, so long as it does not pledge me to be for ever separated from the only woman in the world I care for. You

couldn't ask me to respect such a wish as that, could you ? ”

“Don't let us speak about it any more. The future is in God's hands. The present only is ours, and we must use it wisely. You don't mean to visit your relatives in Devonshire, do you ? ”

“If they ask me, mother, you may depend upon it I will. But they won't ask me. Confound it ! they won't ask me, because I am not able to overcome my father's groundless prejudice, and my uncle is too honourable to throw me in Madaline's way—the right of speaking to her as I wish to speak being denied me.”

“My poor boy ! I am very sorry for you ; but what can I do ? ”

Lady Belmore could not do more than she had done. Her son left her, and her imbecile husband became from day to day more and more the one object of her constant care. She hired the best and most tender nurses that London could supply. Bruce devoted himself to

his master, and Ford, his lordship's own man, cheerfully took his part in the performance of offices which were not always agreeable. But the most untiring nurse of all—the most devoted attendant—the individual in all the household who slept most light, woke most readily, was ever at his side most promptly when needed, ever the last to leave him, even for natural rest—was Lady Belmore. She had been—she did not care now to ask herself what. She was now as tender, true, and self-denying a wife as ever waited on the caprices and the pettishness of a husband weakened by disease in mind as well as in body.

While Lady Belmore was thus devoting herself to the comforts of her lord, and Charley manœuvring his troop, taking his orderly duty, and otherwise acting the part of a zealous cavalry officer in Ipswich, Mr Harris, his wife, and the two girls were living exactly such lives as a clergyman's family is accustomed to do in beautiful Devonshire, provided their circumstances be easy. No claim of the rich or



the poor was ever set aside ; no requirement of church or school, such as village schools were in those days, was neglected ; but quietly and soberly, in perfect earnestness, and without a spark of enthusiasm, all things were done decently and in order. The pastor loved his people—the people loved their pastor with that sober affection which is perhaps better worth retaining on both sides than if it were more demonstrative ; and as to the ladies, their presence in cottage and farmhouse seemed always to operate like the breaking in of a sunbeam. Had they nothing else to do ? Oh yes ! a great deal. They had their neighbours to entertain and to visit, their books to read, their music and drawing wherewith to please themselves and delight others, their sketch-books and pencils, more, as it seemed, than ever called by the younger of the two into requisition. Was that all ? No, by no means. There were quiet broodings in chamber and bower, heartsearchings known only to themselves, letters eagerly looked for, yet read ever,

in the first instance, in solitude, and never answered except when the writer knew that no eye, not even that of a mother, watched her. All this with Emily was pure and unmitigated happiness. Her engagement was no secret. Her friends overwhelmed her with congratulations. She took them all with a grateful heart and beaming countenance, and often told to Madaline how blessed was her lot. Was Madaline's otherwise than blessed too? Surely not. Perhaps hers was a deeper happiness than that of her sister. Certainly it was far more her own, for she shared it with no one, but treasured it up in her innermost soul as something too precious to be spoken about. And yet both Mr and Mrs Harris understood it all. Why then did they hang back, so to speak, from promoting the object on which their hearts were set? Because they were a true couple and a thoughtful, who considered it best to leave whatever might be between Reginald and Madaline to work in its own natural way. Besides, the peculiar relation in which the

young people stood towards each other rendered any open recognition of the sort of love that had matured itself between them a matter of exceeding delicacy, even out of the family circle. And the domestics, it would be difficult to make them understand that such a state of things was not hideous. Wisely, therefore, and considerately, they held their peace, so far as both Madaline and Reginald were concerned. Yet many a long and interesting talk they had one with the other about it, the refrain being usually this—that their joy, come when it will, must be the bitter sorrow of another, and that the twofold discovery which poor Charley must sooner or later effect would either kill or drive him mad.

Of Lord Claud's visits to the Rectory we need not pause to speak. They were frequent in the course of the autumn and winter, and always brought gladness with them. His winning manner, his graceful bearing, the air of high-bred gentleness that surrounded him, won all hearts. Emily's country neighbours and

friends soon got over the dismay which seized them when first told that she was going to marry a man twice her own age, and more than ever she became to them an object of good-natured envy.

"I must confess," said Mrs Broadlands, the wife of the squire, "that he is a most agreeable person. I'm not at all surprised that Emily Harris should have fallen in love with him."

"And he is so handsome, mamma," replied her eldest daughter, Emily's ally and confidant from childhood. "I never saw a more striking-looking man. The slight dash of grey in his dark hair positively improves his appearance."

"Well, I'm not quite sure of that, my dear; but he does look very young for forty-five; though two-and-twenty years are rather too many between a husband and a wife."

"No, mamma; no. Not five-and-forty, only two-and-forty. Emily, you know, is a year younger than I. I won't be three-and-twenty till next birthday, and Lord Claud is just

twenty years older than Emily. That's not much, is it?"

"In this case, perhaps not; but, generally speaking—— Here they are, my love." And, sure enough, just as the mother had thus tried to make her daughter better pleased with the prospect of her friend's marriage, by pointing out what was, in her opinion, the great drawback to it, Lord Claud and his *fiancée* were announced.

It is not to be supposed that Reginald was cut off all this while from participating in the family joy. Like his cousin, he had indeed rejoined his regiment, and, as was customary in those days, was put through a complete course of elementary drill. For the firm conviction at the Horse Guards then was, that active operations in the field make regiments unsteady; and that men returned from three or four sharp campaigns are not fit to take their places on parade till they shall have returned also, side by side with the last-joined recruits, to the goose-step. But Christmas came, and

Reginald, notwithstanding his early leave, was permitted, in consideration of four years' consecutive and unbroken service before the enemy, to spend it at home. What a blessed time it was! True, the Devonshire climate proved faithful to itself. The rain fell; the Tamar was swollen; the wild winds whistled up the valley, tossing the leafless boughs about, and breaking off many a goodly branch from its parent stem. But then as the gusts were frequent, the lulls proved frequent also; and Emily and Madaline took advantage of these to ride with Reginald to the cover-side, and on more than one occasion, we are afraid, to gallop with him through the first burst. Then the long evenings, what a charm there was in them! The Waverley novels were in the full spring-tide of their popularity, and the 'Corsair' and the 'Bride of Abydos' had cast even 'Marmion' and the 'Lady of the Lake' into the shade. And Regy read so well. It seemed, at least to Madaline's partial ear, that the tones of his voice were modulated so as to give per-

fect expression, not so much to what the poet had written, as to what he must have felt when he wrote. And if Reginald's reading delighted her, where was he when she sang? O season of rich promise, when youth is in its prime, and the disappointments that come with maturer age are things heard of, perhaps, yet nowise understood! Who would not gladly return to it again, if only one or other of two impossible contingencies might be bargained for and made sure of? But youth could not bear the weight of a life's experience, retaining at the same time its own elasticity; and death, just as all things round us seem to be at their brightest—no, no! we could not bid it welcome, however much, after our shadows have begun to stretch far to the east, we may regret that it had not interposed between us and the days of which we are constrained to say that "there is no pleasure in them." Well, well, all this has been said and sung a thousand times since time began his courses; and doubtless will be said and sung again a thousand times more. And we put the subject from us with the

single observation, that such grave and platitudinous reflections never once throughout those Christmas holidays entered into the minds of the occupants of the Rectory ; and that the inmates of the Rectory would have been great fools for their pains had they acted otherwise in regard to that matter than they did.



## CHAPTER XX.

### AVOWALS.

It is the month of March 1815—the very beginning of the month, and the family at St Botolphs Rectory are in a state of bustle and pleasurable excitement. For some weeks previously there had been frequent arrivals at the house of boxes, which on being opened were found to contain gorgeous dresses. Presents also were flowing in—jewels, trinkets, card-cases, portfolios—all addressed to Miss Harris, and all accompanied by sweet-scented little notes, expressive of the best wishes of the writers for that young lady's happiness in after-life. Her wedding-day, in short, was fixed; and in fulfilment of the promise made

to Dr Sumner some months before, Mr Harris was preparing to transport the bride-elect, with his wife and Madaline, to London. He carried this purpose into such excellent effect that the party reached Park Street on the 8th, where on the following day they were joined by Reginald. On the 10th the bride was to be given away ; and as both bride and bridegroom desired that the Rector should himself read the service, it was settled that the brother should stand *in loco parentis*. It is said that ladies, as the time draws near when they must commit the keeping of their happiness to a husband's instead of a mother's care, become, however sincerely attached to the man of their choice, nervous. It may be so in the generality of cases ; it was certainly not so with Emily Harris. She leaned already with such perfect confidence on the matured judgment of her future lord, that even the natural regret incident to a final flight from home sat light upon her. A merrier party never gathered round a spring-tide fire than that which, on

the evening of Reginald's arrival, met in Dr Sumner's drawing-room, and greeted each other again next morning at the breakfast-table. But a cloud came suddenly over their gladness when Dr Sumner, unfolding his newspaper, first uttered a cry of intense surprise and then read as follows :—

“ESCAPE OF BUONAPARTE FROM ELBA—  
TREASON OF THE FRENCH ARMY.

“It is our unpleasant duty to announce that information has been received at the Foreign Office of the escape of Napoleon Buonaparte from Elba. How this affair was managed we are as yet unable to describe in detail. All that is known for certain is, that he landed at Frejus with some eight hundred men; that the garrisons of that place and of Grenoble have declared in his favour; and that he is in full march upon Paris. We are much afraid that Europe is about to be involved again in the horrors of war. Let us hope that, if this

troubler of the peace of the world fall again into the hands of the Allies, they will know better than they did a year ago how to deal with him."

There was a dead silence when the Doctor ceased to read. Each looked at the other with expressions which varied according to the temperament of the individuals and the thoughts which what had just been heard called into existence. In the Rector's countenance, as in that of Dr Sumner, grief was mixed with indignation. Reginald's eye first flashed with excitement, and then, turning upon Madaline, became gradually softened into pure sadness. Mrs Harris gazed on her son as mothers do when they know that deadly perils await them; and Emily's joy, radiant as in truth it was, felt a cloud pass over it.

"This is terrible news, Sumner," observed the Rector, speaking first; "I had hoped that there would be no more war in Europe, at least while I lived. It is the gambler's last throw,

however. He cannot possibly hold his own against combined Europe."

"Probably not," replied Dr Sumner, "if every member of the alliance may be depended upon. But think of the amount of misery and expense that must result from a single year of war."

"Oh, Reginald!" exclaimed Mrs Harris, "surely your battalion, that bore the brunt of the war in the Peninsula, will not be sent abroad again?"

"I have no doubt on that head, mamma," replied Reginald. "The Rifles are not likely to be kept out of the fray, if a fray comes; and very sorry they would be not to be in the thick of it. However, don't let us trouble our heads about public affairs at this moment. Has anybody seen or heard anything of Charley of late? Poor fellow! he has had much sorrow at home. I hope he is coming to the wedding."

"Why, no," replied Mr Harris; "considering the relation in which his brother stands to-

wards the Preston family, we thought it best not to ask him. Indeed, we couldn't."

"I am sorry for that," replied Reginald. "I had a letter from him the other day, so full of sadness, that it made my heart ache to read it. He alludes to Emily's marriage, too; and seems to look for an invitation. Would Lord Claud dislike his being present, Emily?"

"I never heard him speak of Charley," replied Emily, "except in the kindest terms. If Lord Claud's feelings only are consulted, I am sure he would prefer having Charley at the wedding."

"But you forget, my dear," observed Mr Harris, "that the Duke was the first to let out that terrible truth. It won't do. The presence of Charley, poor fellow! would throw a damp over the whole meeting. I am sorry, Regy, to do what pains you, and must pain your cousin also; but, depend upon it, I am right."

"Perhaps you are, papa; yet I can't tell you how much it distresses me to leave him

out. God knows, he has little enough enjoyment in his own home."

The conversation ended there; and the circle breaking up, Reginald and Madaline were left alone together in the breakfast-room.

"And you expect to be sent abroad again, Regy?" she said, looking at him with ill-suppressed emotion. "What shall we do without you—and Emily, too?"

"Who can tell, my Madaline? We know nothing as yet. Possibly the statement in the newspaper may be incorrect."

"Oh, no, Regy! Such a report as that would never get abroad if it were groundless."

"My Madaline — my darling!" exclaimed Reginald, unable any longer to restrain himself, and taking her in his arms and kissing her brow. "My sweet sister that once was—now dearer a thousandfold than a thousand sisters—don't grieve. If there be war again you would not wish me to be out of it. God

will watch over me for your sake. Is it not so? Are you not my own—my own?”

What could she say in reply? How could she answer that question? She allowed her head to rest upon his bosom. She let her arms circle round his neck. She heard yet again that musical voice call her by her name, adding the magic words, “Do you love me?” and then, looking up into his face only for one instant, the words escaped her, “You know.” It was all over now. Feelings long pent up had their way. That which each guessed, yet neither heretofore seemed fully to have realised, ceased to be a secret between them; and they stood together knowing that they were all the world to one another.

It is not in public—not even within the circle of those most nearly and tenderly related to her—that a true woman gives vent to her overwrought feelings on occasions such as this. Madaline hastened to her chamber and wept there. Reginald joined his friends; and the radiant smile that lighted up his countenance



sufficed to make them all aware of what had happened.

“My dear Reginald—my noble boy—my brother, my brother!” So rang the chorus of congratulation, in which Dr Sumner in his own way joined. But why go into particulars in such a case? Amid the gladness induced by the knowledge that Regy and Madaline understood one another, all thought of the news of the morning, and of its probable consequences, were forgotten. A happier little knot of persons than that which stood round the fire in Dr Sumner’s drawing-room that morning could not have been found within the bills of mortality.

The wedding-day came in due course. It came, too, amid clear, though not warm, sunshine; and before the altar in St George’s, Hanover Square, Lord Claud and Emily plighted their troth either to other. To the ‘Morning Post’ of the day we refer such of our readers as are curious to know how the bride was attired, by what bridesmaids she

was surrounded, who the friends were that attended the ceremonial, and how the breakfast, which was served in Park Street, went off. Enough for our present purpose it is to record, that no custom in vogue on such occasions was omitted, not even the pelting of the bridal chariot with old shoes; and that, when Mr and Mrs Harris, the Doctor, Reginald, and Madaline were left by the retreating guests amid the remains of the feast, they felt as persons in such circumstances generally do—much relieved that the affair was over. How the elders disposed of themselves till dinner-time could not much interest any persons except themselves. As to Reginald and Madaline, they wrapped themselves up against the March wind, and passing out into Hyde Park, wandered on and on, arm in arm, till they found themselves inside the sunk fence that divides it from Kensington Gardens. They had reached and traversed the broad walk that runs in front of the palace, and were turning upwards along the path which

skirted, in those days, a high wall that cut off the Gardens from the Bayswater Road, when they were roused from that sweet reverie into which happy lovers are apt to fall, by observing the approach of a man whom they simultaneously recognised to be Charles Harris. He was coming towards them, having entered the Gardens, as it seemed, by the gate that stands opposite to what is now Sussex Square. It was doubtful whether he could have noticed them; and, moved by a common instinct, they retreated, without speaking a word, into one of the alcoves, of which some dozen or more skirted the pathway at intervals. If either had asked the other why this step was taken, it may be doubted whether the answer would have been satisfactory or even candid. Reginald perfectly understood what his cousin's feelings were towards Madaline. Madaline perfectly understood them also; and the one, because his own position was as yet, in the eyes of the world, that of her brother—the other, because she shrank from giving pain, where it

was impossible for her to do otherwise, equally desired to avoid if possible the threatened interview. Their desire was an idle one; and the means adopted for its accomplishment rendered the failure only more complete and more distressing. Charles caught sight of them as they passed into the alcove, and, making straight for the same place of shelter, stood before them.

"God bless you both!" was his manly salutation, as he shook hands, first with Reginald, then with Madaline. "Believe me, I did not seek for this. Our meeting, so far as I am concerned, is the merest accident. But having met thus, it cannot be that I should be bound by pledges exacted from me against my will. No; I cannot be bound by them,—it is not meant that I should be."

It was impossible to look at the youth who thus expressed himself without entertaining for him the deepest compassion. He had become thin and worn. The fine fresh colour that used to mantle over his cheek was all

gone, and the cheek itself was become hollow as well as cadaverous. Reginald was greatly moved, and Madaline's large stag-like eyes filled with tears.

"Sit down, Charley; sit down beside us. You are out of breath, and out of spirits too. Believe me that we are all very, very sorry for you. But you can't help it, my boy; it's no fault of yours, and all will come right in the end, if you only bear up like a man as you are."

So spoke Reginald, not insincerely, though on his mind brooded the painful conviction that he was touching but in part the root of his cousin's distress. But the allusion to other matters was lost upon Charley. One idea filled his whole soul; and having made up his mind to break through the restraint which had heretofore kept him silent under it, he hastened to do so.

"Madaline! oh Madaline!" he cried, retaining his upright position, and grasping the hand which he still held in his own, "do

you need that I should tell you what your own heart has told you long ago? I can't live without you. I worship the earth on which you tread. My father and your father both forbid me to say so. But how can I help it? O Madaline! can you—will you be mine?"

No words that man could write or utter would suffice to describe the sensations that passed, while this wild declaration was uttered, through the mind and heart of Reginald. Jealousy there was none, because he felt himself secure in the plighted love of one whom he entirely trusted. But what could he say? what could he do? standing in the eyes of the person who uttered it towards the object of his adoration in the light of a brother. He turned his eyes upon Madaline. She was calm and collected. The one expression on her countenance was pure and unmitigated pity, yet pity so expressed as not for a moment to be mistaken for any warmer feeling.

"Charley," she said, speaking in a clear, unfaltering tone, "I can't tell you how much

what you have just said grieves me. Let me beg of you to think of this no more. I never can be yours—more than I am now. I will always be to you as a sister, if you will take me as such. I never can be more.”

“Don’t say that, Madaline—don’t say that!” cried the poor youth, still gazing into her face with unutterable emotion. “Your father hinted at something of this sort when I spoke to him months ago. If you have any pity in you, don’t say that your affections are engaged.”

“Dear Charley,” answered Madaline, her tone of voice unaltered, “it is not quite fair in you to put the matter thus. But if nothing else will lead you to give that generous heart to some other girl who may value it as it deserves, I need not scruple to say that papa told you the truth. I cannot give what I have not. I will be your sister; I never can be more.”

“So be it, Madaline—so be it,” replied Charley, relinquishing her hand, while his voice sank

almost to a whisper. "I won't ask you who the happy person is. I thought that I had watched you closely, and flattered myself that, unless it were your brother, no man came near you whose society you preferred to mine. But I was mistaken, it appears. My self-love blinded me. O that it had killed me too! Well," he continued, getting himself together again—for he had stooped, as if unable to stand upright, while speaking—"there's still a chance for me. Regy, are you under orders too? We have received ours, and embark for Ostend as soon as we can provide ourselves with camp-equipments."

"What!" exclaimed Reginald, "under orders for the Netherlands?"

"Yes," answered Charley, restored, as it seemed, a good deal to himself; "the despatch reached the colonel yesterday morning. I came off immediately, intending to get a few necessary articles, and then to bid you good-bye. I called in Park Street three hours ago, and was told that you were all at church. It



was Emily's wedding, wasn't it, that took you there? I forgot, or I should have deferred my visit."

"It was," replied Reginald: "and very sorry both Madaline and I were that you had not been invited. My father thought, however, that it would be unpleasant to all parties had you met the Prestons."

"The Prestons! Oh, my dear Regy, believe me that the Prestons are nothing to me, nor am I anything to them. The Duke behaved, I believe, with very little delicacy on a certain occasion. But I don't mind that. No, no; there were other reasons than any possible *gêne* between the Prestons and me that made your father leave me out. And they were good reasons,—yes, excellent reasons. I should have thrown a cloud over your happiness, just as I am now doing my best to sadden both of you. But this shan't be again. Farewell, Regy! We may meet—probably we shall meet—in the field. Farewell, dear Madaline! we shall meet no more. May all happiness

attend you and the partner of your choice, whosoever he may be. For me there is a place of rest, and, please God, the bullet or the sword will help me to it ere long."

It was impossible that Madaline should be otherwise than deeply affected by these solemn words. She wept tears of true compassion. Neither did she turn aside from the embrace which, in the presence of one lover, the other offered to her. She allowed Charles to clasp her once in his arms ; she allowed him to imprint a kiss upon her brow. He shook Reginald warmly by the hand after this, and turned away. He was soon out of sight, for he walked very fast.

letters handed in not one either bore on its exterior the cabalistic words "On his Majesty's Service," or advertised Reginald that the leaves were cancelled, and that he must join his regiment immediately. We all know how rapid, for the moment how complete, is the rebound from anxiety to its opposite. They were safe for the day, at all events. No order could reach them now for four-and-twenty hours at least, because the deliveries by the general post amounted, even in London, to one in each day, and no more. To fling care to the winds, and make the most of the reprieve thus granted, was a wise suggestion, which commanded, as it deserved, universal approval. But how could the proposal best be acted upon? London was still, so far as society went, comparatively empty; and had the contrary been the case, no member of the Harris family desired to plunge into its vortex. But no objection was raised to Dr Summer's suggestion, that they should dine early, and then adjourn to the play; and the Haymarket being at that time

in the height of its popularity, to the Hay-market it was decided that they should go.

A box was easily secured, or, to speak more correctly, five good places were easily taken in the dress circle, being the exact spot whence, in the very centre of the house, they could command a full view of the stage without being compelled to see beyond it. The bill of fare, as represented on the *affiche*, was excellent. It comprised Sheridan's comedy 'The Rivals,' with a melodrama—then much admired—as an after-piece, called 'The Maid and the Magpie.' Our party, therefore, set out, if not in boisterous spirits, at all events determined to be pleased, and reached their box just as the first scene in the comedy was begun. On the four chairs in front, Mr and Mrs Harris, with Madaline and Reginald—the latter only by a sort of moral compulsion—seated themselves, while the Doctor took a seat behind, so as to converse easily with the Rector and his wife.

The house was well filled without being crowded, and the actors did their parts respect-

ably. Our friends, therefore, felt their interests go with the piece as it proceeded; and during the intervals between the acts they did as the frequenters of theatres usually do, criticise the performance. By-and-by a fresh source of interest was opened to them. Exactly as the clock struck nine there came streaming into all parts of the house a subsidiary audience, which struck Mrs Harris and Madaline as being composed not of the *élite* of the population. It was the flux of that tide which, to the playgoing portion of the community, is known as "half-price," and very noisy here and there, as well as somewhat rude, it appeared to be. Yet one remarkable exception to the general rule of "every man for himself, and one who shall be nameless for us all," presented itself. There came in on the very crest of the first wave, which neither jostled nor tried to pass them by—which, on the contrary, made way for them, and helped them to a particular spot about the centre of the pit—two persons, a

man and a woman, the latter advanced, by some years, beyond middle life, the former evidently aged and infirm. The woman seemed to be a respectable tradesman's wife—perhaps a gentleman's housekeeper. The man would have been tall but that he stooped a good deal. He had about him, moreover, the air of one who was not then in his right place, but must have seen better days. His dress, also, was peculiar. A three-cornered hat surmounted his well-powdered head; and over his shoulders, extending half-way down his back, hung a pigtail. A *roquelaire*, or loose greatcoat, enveloped his form; and in his right hand he carried a silver-mounted cane. It was very touching to see with what deference both the moving throng and the audience already assembled appeared to treat that man. More than one of the latter held out their hands to help him in scrambling to a position which was at once vacated in his favour by another who had held it till he came. And his mode of acknowledging these kindnesses bespoke

him to be a thorough gentleman, though of a school already becoming old.

“Who can that be, mamma?” asked Madeline of Mrs Harris. “He is no common person, otherwise the people wouldn’t treat him with such deference.”

“I have not the least idea, my love. He looks like a foreigner. Do you know him, Doctor?”

The Doctor did not know him, nor, of course, did either Mr Harris or Reginald. But there was no time for further speculation; for just then the call-bell rang, and the drop-scene being raised, the play went forward.

However well disposed an English audience may be to show respect to individuals in the intervals of a drama, there is one point on which they are very determined. They will allow nobody, not even royalty itself, to come between them and the full enjoyment of the spectacle for which they have paid their money. “Sit down—hats off!” rang through the pit the moment the curtain began to rise,

and thenceforth till it fell again every tongue was mute, and every eye and ear fixed on the sayings and doings of the actors. But the moment the drop-scene fell again, there was confusion everywhere. The commotion in the pit, the jabber of many voices, the eating and drinking that went on for a few seconds, amused as much as it interested our friends from the country. They looked towards the spot where the foreign gentleman had seated himself, and observed that in this peculiarly English mode of relaxing the attention he never joined. It seemed, indeed, as if he shrank from the contemplation of it, much more from making common cause with the people that surrounded him. But presently, after most of these had resumed their seats, he rose, and getting upon the bench, not without assistance from his neighbours, took what appeared to be a deliberate survey of the whole house. Slowly his eyes wandered from floor to ceiling—slowly his form turned as the survey proceeded—till, by-and-by, he had faced completely round, and stood directly



fronting the box in which Dr Sumner's party was seated. What does he see there that makes him start? Why are his arms flung up? A moment more, and there bursts from him a cry that is heard through the whole house. He speaks in a foreign tongue, which few in the pit understand. They are hushed, however, into absolute silence; and clear and distinct upon the ears of the Harris family and Dr Sumner fall the words: "My darling! my darling! I have found you at last. God has been very gracious. Come to me, my Madaline; come to me, my treasure, and never leave me more!"

Up rose, on hearing her companion's exclamation, the woman who had accompanied him into the theatre, and, grasping his arm, strove to replace him on his seat. He pushes away her hand, and exclaims, this time in English—"Look there, Madam Todd! don't you see her? don't you know her? Let me go! I will take her out—she shall not escape me this time!"

"What are you a-doing, Mr Discover?"

What are you a-dreaming of ? Deary me, will the poor gentleman never be cured. God bless me ! what's that ?" she continued, suddenly interrupting herself. "As sure as there's a soul in my body, if that bean't she, it's her ghost !"

Our friends saw and heard all this, not less surprised, nor less interested, than the rest of the audience. They saw, likewise, the old man, followed by the woman, make his way eagerly through the crowd, which, so far from jeering or mocking him, opened out for him, and helped him over the benches. He has reached the gangway now, and with steps rapid though infirm, is hurrying towards the outlet. There he disappears from their vision, but it is not for long. Presently footsteps are heard in the corridor. Anon the box-door is flung open, and he and his companion stand in the aperture.

"Have I found you at last, my darling, my Madaline ! Why did you leave me ? Why have you been so long absent ? why so long silent ? Come back with me now, and be

again the light of my eyes! Do you not know me, my sweet one?" continued the old man, pressing forward through the space which the occupants of the back seats in the box made haste to leave free to him. "Have you forgotten your uncle, and Madam Todd, too, our landlady?"

All this passed so rapidly that neither Dr Sumner nor Mr and Mrs Harris were able so far to collect their thoughts as to take in more than was presented to the outer senses. They had never to their knowledge seen either M. de Couvré or Mrs Todd before. What these persons could mean by seeking them out in this manner, and how they could have got hold of Madaline's name,—these were, for the moment, mysteries towards the solution of which all clue seemed to be wanting; but it was not wanting long.

"I think, sir, that you are labouring under some great mistake," said the Doctor, addressing M. de Couvré in French. "Neither I nor any of these ladies and gentlemen can claim

the honour of your acquaintance. You mistake us, or some of us, for what we are not."

"I make no mistake, sir," replied M. de Couvré. "I do not claim the honour of being acquainted with you or with either of these gentlemen, or with the elder of these two ladies. But can I be mistaken when my own flesh and blood stands before me? Madaline, my darling! come to your uncle, and don't disown him before these strangers."

"Madaline?" said the Doctor — "what Madaline? This lady's Christian name is Madaline, no doubt, but how is she your niece?"

"Because she is the daughter of my sister—because she escaped with me from France when the miscreants who butchered her father and mother were close upon our heels—because she is my Madaline—Madaline de la Fontaine—and will acknowledge herself to be such, if you do not stand between us."

In a moment Mr Harris had dashed over the chair beside which he was standing, and,

closing with the old man, said in a whisper, "Did you name Madaline de la Fontaine?"

"Did I name my own niece? To be sure I did. Leave them, Madaline—leave them, and come home with me."

"Sir," continued Mr Harris, "we will all go home with you; at all events, Madaline and my friend here and I will bear you company. Reginald, take care of your mother. Come, Madaline, my darling, the hand of God is in this."

"Where does this gentleman live, my good woman?" asked Dr Sumner of Mrs Todd. "What's his name?"

"His name is Mr Discover, sir. He is a French gentleman. He came to my lodgings over eighteen years ago, and has been there ever since. And a good, worthy gentleman he is; only he is bewildered, poor man! And now I see the young lady close, though she is very like—as like at a distance as two peas—she is not the person he has been looking for. Lord love you! how could she be, and

she so young? Why, it's seventeen years at least since his niece left him."

By this time M. de Couvré, Mrs Todd, Mr Harris, Dr Sumner, and Madaline were at the foot of the stair. A hackney-coach was drawn up at the Doctor's call, and all of them getting in, the driver put the usual question, "Where to?"

"Be you going home, gentlemen?" asked Mrs Todd.

"To your home, certainly," replied Mr Harris. "Where is it?"

"No. 39 St Ann Street, Soho," replied Mrs Todd; and to 39 St Ann Street, Soho, the vehicle was directed to be driven.

What the feelings were all this while of the several members of the party which set out from Park Street only a couple of hours ago, bent on escaping for a brief space from anxiety and care, it would be no easy matter to say. The two who lingered in the theatre, and by-and-by quitted it to return home, were utterly amazed. It seemed to both, especially to Regi-

nald, that they were passing through a dream, the issues of which were yet uncertain. They asked no questions one of the other, but, as if stupefied by what was already in the past, waited in silence for the future to develop itself. The other three were silent during the drive to 39, though for different reasons. Mr Harris, confident that the mystery was about to be cleared up which had heretofore shrouded the birth of his *protégé*, looked almost with as much of pain as of satisfaction to the probable issue. The Doctor, pondering the same thing, was full of hope, on account both of Madaline herself and of his friend's son. He had advocated the meting out of strict justice from the beginning, and rejoiced with unmixed joy over the prospect that it must be rendered now. As to Madaline, her mind was in a maze. She heard that old man call her by her name, speak to her in a tone of tender affection, claim her as a near relation, yearn over her as a father yearns over a child. Her heart answered to the appeal, and already she loved

him dearly, as well as pitied him. But then her heart was full of other loves too, and these she could never make subordinate to any new claim—no, nor place it on a level with them. As to M. de Couvré, his joy knew no bounds. He took Madaline's hand in his, kissed it, and held it throughout the entire journey. He called her by every endearing epithet that his native tongue could bring out. He spoke to her of things which were strange and unintelligible, and of places and people of whom she had never heard before; and when she failed to take in his meaning, he sometimes moaned aloud, sometimes reproached her, but never angrily. And good Mrs Todd, she was simply dumbfounded. As she herself expressed it, when telling the story in after years, "It was altogether the queerest thing that ever she did see. There was one young lady so like to the other that she didn't wonder at Mr Discover confounding them for a moment. But then, deary me, if he had but a-thought. Why, it were seventeen years since his own young lady



left him, and this young lady couldn't be more than seventeen years old altogether. How could they two be one? You couldn't make him take this in, however—no, not to the last. It were a very queer thing, indeed; and yet the poor old man were comforted by it."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE LIGHT STRENGTHENS.

THE hackney-coach, with its miscellaneous load, reached No. 39 in good time, and the whole party, at Mrs Todd's special desire, followed her into her own parlour. With a delicacy scarcely to be expected in one in her station in life, she then lighted the candles, placed them on the table, and withdrew. M. de Couvré, still holding Madaline's hand in his, was the first to speak.

"Yes, my darling, yes. This is our home for the present; and, till we hear that all is quiet in beautiful France, here we will remain. You remember the nice apartments we used to occupy up-stairs. Madam Todd will give

them to us again ; and I have ample means—plenty to live upon—more than we shall require—till we get back our lands, and are in a position to repay the debt. Gentlemen, gentlemen,” he continued, turning to Mr Harris and the Doctor, “ I will not ask you why you detained her so long ; I will not charge either of you with doing anything so wicked as to carry her away against her will. For you have behaved well to her, that I see. She is exactly what she was when she left me, and I am too grateful for getting her back to utter a single complaint against you who restore her. But you must come up-stairs, my darling,” he went on to say, addressing himself again to Madaline. “ My apartment is a shabby one. I chose it because Madam Todd let me have it at an easy rent, and I had the more money to spare for seeking you at the theatres, where those bad men told me I should find you, and where I have found you, thank God ! Yes, you must come up-stairs, and get back your apparel, and all the effects which you left in

my charge. They have never been moved. I have never once examined into the contents of the trunk. No, no, no! I would not do it, though Mr Brackenbury urged me to do so, because, he said, something would probably be found which might enable me to trace you. But I had your letter in my heart as well as in my mind, and no consideration on earth would have induced me to violate the confidence you reposed in me. See, my darling, here it is; I have carried it about with me till it scarce holds together. But the handwriting is yours, and you will recognise it still."

Madaline took from the old man the same letter with the contents of which our readers are acquainted, and which, though faded and worn, was still legible. She glanced her eye over it, and then, handing it to Mr Harris, said,—

"Yes, let him read it too. He has been more than a father to me."

"May God in heaven reward him!" cried

the old man, and then away he went again, pouring out endearing epithets, and speaking to Madaline as if she were the very person whom he persisted in believing her to be. "And look," he went on, "here is the portrait that was painted of you—do you not remember?—painted of you on that happy occasion when we all believed that you were shortly to become the bride of the young Count de la Roche Jaquelaine. Ah! it was soon after that that the two English travellers arrived at the chateau, and the wedding was put off—I never understood why—and, instead of giving the portrait to the young count, you gave it to me, my darling, and wept bitterly as you did so. Don't you remember all this; and the horrid outbreaks that followed, and our flight to Lyons—yours rather, and your dear parents'—where I was able, for a while, to afford them hospitality. Madaline! Madaline! all this cannot be strange to you. You cannot have forgotten what I, old as I am, so well remember."

There was something inexpressibly piteous in the tones of the old man's voice, as he thus poured out his whole soul before one who, however sympathising and generous, could not answer him as he desired and expected. There was something far more startling, and almost quite as piteous, in the effect which his conversation, and the acts which accompanied it, produced upon Mr Harris. He received the miniature from Madaline, threw himself upon a chair, gazed at it as well as the tears that chased one another over his cheeks would allow, and kissing it, said aloud, "Even so, best beloved! At least your memory shall be vindicated, and justice done to your daughter."

Perhaps it was well for all concerned that there was one person in that room capable of dealing with the circumstances of the case as it then presented itself. Dr Sumner interposed between M. de Couvré and Madaline, and suggested that, as it was getting late, the best thing they could do would be to defer further explanations till the morrow. "De-

pend upon it that this gentleman and I are true friends both to Madaline and yourself. All that is mysterious and dark in this affair we will help you to elucidate, but it can't be done now."

"No, we cannot go into the past at this moment," replied M. de Couvré, apparently taking in only half that the Doctor meant to convey. "We should not get through it till daybreak. But to-morrow—ay, to-morrow—we will put everything straight. Won't we, Madaline—won't we? Madam Todd! dear me!—where is Madam Todd?"

The Doctor pulled the bell, and Mrs Todd entered.

"Where is my darling to sleep, Madam Todd? She is tired; she wants to go to bed. Where can she sleep till we return to our old apartments?"

"There's not an empty bed in the house, sir," replied Mrs Todd; "and if there were, these gentlemen would not leave the young lady behind them, I suppose."

“Not leave her behind them ! What do you mean, Madam Todd ? Have they not brought her home ? They will not take her away again.”

“I am afraid we must, for to-night, sir,” rejoined the Doctor. “But here is my card ; and to my house she will go. If we don’t return to you to-morrow long before noon, then you may seek her out there. Nay, don’t distrust us. We are her friends and yours.”

“How can I tell that ? how am I to be assured that you are not going to spirit her away a second time ? No, no, she bides with me ; I part from her only with my life !”

So saying, the old man drew from his cane a sword-blade, and, brandishing it in his hand, placed himself with his back to the parlour-door. He looked as fierce as it was in his nature to do, but it was the ferocity, not of the she-bear guarding her cubs, but of the sheep interposing between her lamb and danger. Gradually his eye lost its fire, however, and the arm which had been stretched out as if for deadly combat, fell to his side.



"I have no strength ; I am old and very feeble. Spare me, gentlemen, and spare her !"

"Mr Discover," interposed Mrs Todd, gently taking the sword-cane out of his hand, "you may surely trust me. You know what I have done for you, and how much I strove to get back your lost one, knowing all the while that it would be of no use. Take my word for it, neither of these gentlemen is the man that carried her away. I have seen him but once since the wicked deed was done, and that was at Drury Lane, the same night that you and I began together the search that has extended now over seventeen years. I tell you the man I saw that night is not in the room ; neither of these is he. Let the young lady go with them to-night. They will bring her back to you to-morrow, for that I will become surety."

"Is it your wish to go, my darling ?" asked the old man, looking wistfully at Madaline.

"For to-night, yes, dear uncle. They are my dear, dear friends. They will come back with me to-morrow."

"Then go, and God watch over you," said M. de Couvré, mournfully. "Kiss me, my darling ; I feel very weak ; I must lie down."

He was very weak. The shock had been too great for him. His intellect seemed to become clouded. Madaline kissed him lovingly ; and he tottered out of the room, whether believing that she was to sleep under the same roof, or only to return on the morrow, as she had promised, seemed uncertain. He was glad also, for the first time in his life, to avail himself of Mrs Todd's assistance in mounting the stair ; and spoke to her all the while as if the one great object for which he lived had been attained. She got him to bed with difficulty, and returned immediately to her guests in the parlour. These had waited for her return, for they saw how trustworthy the woman was.

"I will take the letter and miniature with me, Mrs Todd," said Mr Harris. "They will be perfectly safe in my keeping ; and early to-morrow morning Dr Sumner and I will return. Oh, yes !" he continued, seeing that she was

going to interrupt him, "the young lady shall come also. But we have a search to make, at which it might be inconvenient if she were present. I understand she can sit in your parlour while we are so occupied? Be it so. Did it not strike you, by the by, that the old man's countenance was a good deal changed when he quitted the room? He looked to me very ill."

"I doubt whether he'll ever be himself again," replied Mrs Todd; "I think this night will kill him."

"I hope not—I hope not," replied the Doctor. "Give him wine, or some hot brandy-and-water. Has he no friends among his own countrymen?"

"Not one as comes to see him now, only Father Jerome, a priest, and he's getting very old and infirm too. He hasn't been here these three weeks."

"Father Jerome! Father Jerome, did you say?" asked Mr Harris, eagerly.

"Yes, sir, Father Jerome; a good, quiet, God-fearing man, though he be a Popish priest."

"I wish you would ask him to meet us here to-morrow?"

"I can do that, sir, if you wish; but an't you a minister of our own church?"

"To be sure I am, Mrs Todd; is that any reason why I should not desire to see and converse with Father Jerome?"

"None at all, sir, as I sees; only I thought you mightn't like his bringing that crucifix with him, I think they call it."

"Never mind about the crucifix. If the exhibition of that is a comfort to M. de Couvré, neither you nor I would withhold it, Mrs Todd. But I want Father Jerome for other purposes."

"Very well, sir; he shall be here."

"What does all this mean, papa?" asked Madaline, after Mr Harris, she, and the Doctor were again in a hackney-coach. "Is the poor old man really a relative of mine? And am I then a foreigner, and no connection whatever of yours?"

"I believe that poor old man to be a relative,

and a near relative, of yours, my child ; but it does not, therefore, follow that there is no blood connection between you and me. I hope and believe that to-morrow will bring many a hidden thing of darkness to light."

Little more was said during the homeward drive. Mr Harris, the Doctor, and Madaline seemed all to be exhausted with what they had gone through ; and hence, though they found Mrs Harris and Reginald sitting up to receive them, they did not enter with them into any lengthened explanations. Nor was it necessary. Mrs Harris, already mistress of one great section of the family secret, in some measure grasped, by intuition, a good deal of another. Reginald, ignorant of everything, except that Madaline was not his sister, cared comparatively little about the details of her early history. He therefore abstained from putting any questions either to her or to his father. They all went quietly to bed.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### DAYBREAK.

FAITHFUL to their promise, Mr Harris and Dr Sumner were at 39 St Ann Street early next day. They did not forget to carry Madaline with them, though both felt that in the present stage of the business she would have been better away. But the pledge given to Mrs Todd could not be broken, and the feelings of M. de Couvré were a great deal too sacred in the eyes of all three to be disregarded. Madaline, therefore, went with them, though warned that she would be expected, after greeting the poor old man, to wait the issue of the conference with him in Mrs Todd's parlour. Mrs Todd opened the

door for them herself, and greeted them kindly.

“How is the patient?” asked Dr Sumner.

“He had a sad night, sir,” replied Mrs Todd. “He slept but little; for, though he didn’t know it, poor gentleman, I looked in upon him two or three times, and always found him awake and talking to himself. His mind wanders, I am afraid; leastwise he speaks to me now in some strange tongue. Mayhap you will understand him, though I don’t.”

Mrs Todd hereupon led the way; and Mr Harris, Dr Sumner, and Madaline ascended to M. de Couvré’s chamber. It was scrupulously clean, though, as we have elsewhere shown, plainly and scantily furnished. M. de Couvré himself was in bed; and beside him sat an old man, dressed as Roman Catholic priests considered it expedient to dress in those days—in a suit of plain black, with a white handkerchief about his neck. He might have passed muster, indeed, as minister of a mere dissenting congregation, but that he held in

his hand a small silver crucifix. This he was in the act of presenting to the sick man to kiss, when the visitors from Park Street entered.

"I fear we interrupt you, sir," said Mr Harris, addressing the stranger in French. "If Mrs Todd had told us you were engaged in religious exercise with M. de Couvré we should have waited till your service was over. Shall we retire now?"

"No ; not at all," replied the priest. "Our service is over. Pray, come in. M. de Couvré has told me a strange tale, which I cannot comprehend ; but you are, I presume, the gentlemen of whom he was speaking, and this is the lady whom he takes for his niece. Holy Mother of God !" exclaimed the priest, his eyes now falling upon Madaline, "I never saw such a likeness in my life ! Who are you, my daughter ? Whence do you come ?"

M. de Couvré appeared to have been so entirely engrossed with the business of confession, that he did not notice the entrance



of the newcomers into his chamber ; for they trod softly, and Mrs Todd opened the door without causing the slightest jar. But the last exclamation of the priest, uttered as it was in a sort of shriek, roused him ; and with difficulty raising himself in bed, he saw Madaline, and held out his arms to embrace her.

“My darling, my darling! it is herself in reality. It was no dream, no vision that came to cheer and leave me, as others have done. You are here—your very self—in the body—here, to close my eyes, and to be the last earthly object on which they shall rest.”

Madaline, as may be supposed, pressed forward to receive the old man’s embrace, and to lay him gently back upon his pillow. There he lay, too much exhausted to speak, but with his gaze fixed upon her whom he believed to be his niece, and with her hand grasped in his. Meanwhile, Mr Harris, entering into conversation with the priest, got from him all the information which he desired to collect. The gentleman before him

was the identical Father Jerome who, when he and his brother were guests in the Château de la Fontaine, had officiated as chaplain to the Count. It chanced that between him and Mr Harris hardly any intercourse had taken place. For in times anterior to the Revolution, domestic chaplains in the great houses of France rarely lived with the family. It was the etiquette rather for such to affect asceticism, so far at least that they inhabited entirely the rooms set apart for them, and saw very little either of the lord or lady of the house, except when engaged in the offices of religion. Hence, though they might have met,—indeed, must have met,—fortuitously, in galleries and passages, nothing ever passed between them of a nature to impress even the personal appearance of the one on the memory of the other. Mr Harris had, however, his own reasons for making Father Jerome believe that he perfectly recollected him, and to these he soon came.

“Then it was you,” he said, “who performed

the ceremony of marriage in the chapel of the château, between the Count's daughter and one of the Englishmen who were guests in the house ?”

Father Jerome started. He looked hard at the individual who thus addressed him, and said, “How came you to be aware of that occurrence ? I did wrong. I laid myself open to the censures of the Church for breach of trust. I could not resist her entreaty. Did she betray me ?”

“No—no,” replied Mr Harris ; “never—never ! She was incapable of betraying any one. Not from her has the information come to me, but from another quarter equally trustworthy. You did perform the ceremony ?”

“I did ; and since the truth has come out, I must take the consequences.”

“No evil can befall you,” replied Mr Harris. “She has been long dead. The girl whom M. de Couvré mistakes for the Madaline whom you and I knew is her daughter.”

The priest crossed himself, breathed a short

prayer, and asked in a tone expressive of real anguish, "Where then is her husband?—where is the Mr Harris to whom she was united?"

"It is a long story—too long to be entered upon now. And besides, there are reasons why, for the present, it should not be made more public than is absolutely necessary. Who were present when the ceremony took place?"

"Only Mademoiselle's maid, and she perished in the massacre at Lyons, and one Englishman—the same that was travelling tutor to Mr Harris and his brother—a Monsieur Brackenbury."

"Thank you a thousand times for the information you have given me. Make your mind quite easy. It is of infinite use to others; it shall never be turned to your hurt. I am the brother of the Mr Harris of whom you speak. Mr Brackenbury was my tutor as well as his. I was in the château at the time of the marriage. Was no written record made of the act?"

“Oh yes! I made the record myself, and gave it with my own hand to Mademoiselle. If it exist, it bears my signature as that of the officiating priest, and the signatures of Mr Brackenbury and the maid. But does it exist?”

“Who can tell? But whether it exist or not, we are possessed of collateral proof, which, supported by your evidence—and you will, of course, give it when called upon—will establish the rights of that maiden, and justify her mother’s memory.”

They had proceeded thus far when M. de Couvré, raising himself again upon his elbow, called upon Father Jerome to come near.

“Father Jerome,” he said, in a voice comparatively firm, “you see that chest. It contains my Madaline’s wardrobe. She left it in my keeping when she went away, and I have been true to my trust. Here is the key; I have never parted from it; it has been under my pillow at night, and by day I always carried it about with me. Take it. Give it to

my darling. She will find everything the chest contains exactly as she arranged it."

So saying, he handed to Father Jerome an antique key, which he had taken from beneath the pillow, and almost immediately fell back in a state of utter exhaustion. Indeed, it seemed for a moment that the vital powers had failed; but it was not so. He opened his eyes again, and seeing Madaline, with Father Jerome, standing over him, made a strong effort to rally. His lips moved; but for a while they produced no articulate sound. At last the words came, though only in a whisper, "Kiss me, my darling!—Madaline——" She stooped down to catch what might follow, but nothing came. She kissed his brow. The chill of death was already upon it. On her, and only on her, the old man's eye rested, till it became fixed and sightless. A smile lighted up his countenance for a moment, and without a groan, without a struggle, he passed away. Happy man he—happy men all—who die in the conviction that their life has served its pur-

pose. The purpose for which alone, throughout seventeen long years, that man had lived and desired to live seemed to him to have been achieved. He believed that he had recovered his long-lost treasure; and if in this he laboured under a delusion, what then? It was a reality to him.

Solemnised rather than shocked—saddened, yet nowise torn with anguish, the little group who had watched that kind and true soul take its flight from the body, bowed their heads reverentially while the priest read the prayer appointed by his Church to be offered up on such occasions. Their prejudices were not shocked; they joined heartily in the desire that “the soul of the departed” might enter into rest. This ceremony over, Father Jerome gave the key of the chest to Madaline, Mrs Todd willingly undertaking to keep it in charge till after the funeral. For not in the presence of the dead could any of them go into matters which concerned the living, however interesting and important. They all quitted the cham-

ber ; and having agreed to meet again in the same place after the funeral, and given directions that it should be arranged to the satisfaction of Father Jerome, they went their several ways.

As one physical pain is said to drive out another, so one great and absorbing care undeniably takes the sting out of other cares. On returning to Park Street, Mr Harris ascertained that soon after he had quitted it in the morning a letter arrived from the Horse Guards desiring Reginald to rejoin his regiment with as little delay as possible. The battalion, it appeared, was warned already for foreign service ; and as the order to embark might arrive any moment, the leaves both of officers and men were cancelled. Reginald perfectly understood the purport of this missive. He knew, also, that any attempt to get the sentence reversed, or even postponed, would be useless ; so he faced the occasion like a man, and encouraged those about him to face it also. There was much depression of spirits, as may be



imagined ; yet, on the whole, the parting which took place on the morrow failed to put out the light wholly, both for him who went away and for her who stayed behind. Youth is the season of hope, and hope well-founded tides us over many a present anxiety. Besides, let the truth be told. The events that had just occurred, and the consequences which might be expected to follow upon them, were, to all concerned, so important that, brought face to face with them, a parting which they readily believed to be only for a season, lost most of its bitterness. Reginald was to go down to Shorncliffe, where his battalion was quartered, by a coach which started at six o'clock in the morning. He insisted, therefore, upon saying farewell to his friends over-night ; and though Madaline disregarded the arrangement, and followed him, weeping, to the door, even her eyes, though swollen, had in some degree recovered their usual expression when the family met at breakfast.

It had been arranged that Mr Harris and Dr

Sumner should both attend M. de Couvré's funeral. They were not invited to the religious ceremonial, which in those days could only be performed in private over the dead, being Roman Catholics ; but they both requested leave to be present, and the leave was readily granted. In the churchyard of the parish the body was laid—a hideous place, as all our intramural cemeteries then were. Hideous as it was, however, care had been taken to protect the remains from being disturbed (a not unfrequent occurrence under ordinary circumstances) by committing them to a brick grave. This done, Mr Harris, Dr Sumner, and Father Jerome adjourned to No. 39. They found Madaline and Mrs Harris there before them, and the precious chest removed from the spot which it had so long occupied to Mrs Todd's parlour on the ground-floor. Round it all drew their chairs ; while Father Jerome, applying the key to each of the three locks, rolled back the arched lid, and exposed its contents. How faded were the once beautiful cambrics which, one by one, the

priest drew out ! How spotted and discoloured the costly silks ! how dingy the lace ! These, reverently and piece by piece, were deposited on the sofa, no hand but his presuming to touch them. He came next to the body of the trunk, over which a rich shawl of Lyons fabric was drawn. He raised it, and in doing so shook out the case, wherein in early days the miniature with which our readers are acquainted used to be kept. It fell to the ground. Mr Harris took it up, saw at once for what it was intended, drew from his own bosom the miniature itself, and without speaking a word, handed it to Madaline.

“Who is this ?” she cried, with difficulty commanding herself.

“Your mother, my love. Can you be surprised at the old man’s mistake ?”

Madaline cared for nothing further. Round the portrait of her mother all her interests centred ; and she sat apart, her tears falling fast as she held it before her eyes. Meanwhile the search went on, and by-and-by, at the very

bottom of the trunk, a little parcel, carefully wrapped in tissue paper, was found. The wrappings were withdrawn, and a small pocket-book, made of rich purple velvet, and fastened with a gold button and loop, made its appearance. Father Jerome undid the fastening, and found that the pocket-book contained the identical document which, with his own hand, he had drawn up, and which testified to the marriage, long, long ago, of Francis Harris and Madaline de la Fontaine, in the presence of Thomas Brackenbury and Elize Sabot.

“There is no mistake now, my Madaline,” said Mr Harris, solemnly; “no further need to keep silence. You are my niece, the daughter of Lord Belmore, the sister of the poor youth from whom you parted in Kensington Gardens, our Reginald’s cousin, and, if it be God’s will, our own dear daughter yet to be, when times are propitious. God bless you, my child!”

We draw a veil over all that followed,—the astonishment, not less than the pure joy, of Madaline—her anxiety to hear more of the

mother whom she had never seen, and the tenderness of the friends by whom she was surrounded. Enough is done when we state that the box, with its contents, was removed to Park Street, where Father Jerome found a cordial welcome ; and where, in due time, consultations were held respecting the course of behaviour which it would become necessary to enter upon. What the conclusions were to which these consultations led will be seen by-and-by.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DISCLOSURES.

"It is a long and sad story, Sumner," said Mr Harris, in reply to his friend, as they sat over their wine that day, the ladies having purposely left them alone together. "I never had courage to tell it in full to you before, nor can I bring myself to enter into details now ; but you shall have the outlines.

"We had made the tour of France, Germany, and Italy, and were returning by way of Marseilles and Lyons to Paris, when, travelling up the beautiful valley of the Soane, our carriage was upset. We were all a good deal hurt, because the accident happened at a part of the road where it passes along the edge of a ravine.

We might have continued our journey, however, but on looking to Frank, we found that his leg was broken, and that he had sustained other injuries. Just at this moment, while Brackenbury and I were at a loss what to do, a gentleman carrying a gun, and attended by three or four chasseurs, rode up. It was the Count de la Fontaine, whose château stood not far off, and who, having noticed the accident, made haste to offer all the assistance in his power. Frank was lifted upon one of the keepers' horses. Brackenbury and I were constrained to mount other two, and the keepers themselves supporting my brother by turns, we were conducted to the château.

“Frank's illness proved to be a serious one. The injury to the limb was soon put to rights, but a fever ensued, through which Madame la Comtesse nursed him as if he had been her son. Oh, Sumner! there was another besides the Countess there—Madaline went and came like an angel of light. I can't go on. Forgive me—forgive me! I cannot even now refer to the

incidents in that stage of my existence and retain composure. We both fell in love with Madaline. No wonder—no wonder! She was so bright, so gentle, so good. Her singing—I never heard anything that approached to it in my life, except her daughter's. Well, well—to make a long story short, Madeline proved to be betrothed, as her father assured me, when I opened my mind to him without reserve, and had been so from her childhood, to the son of one of his oldest friends: my proposals could not, therefore, be entertained. What could I do? I told my tale to Madaline also. I blame myself for that now; but I was young then, and carried away by passion. Judge of my dismay when she told me that she had given all her affections to my brother. Yes, Frank had availed himself of the opportunities which his condition afforded to steal away her heart, not ignorant all the while of the base return he was making for the kindness of her parents. We had high words on the occasion. Frank vindicated his own procedure, and told



me that he had written for his father's consent to the marriage. It was refused, and with the refusal came a peremptory order to return home without an hour's delay. Galled, wounded, outraged as I was, I could not find in my heart to put Count de la Fontaine on his guard. I saw them much together; I knew what their converse was about; but it never entered into my mind to suppose that Frank would propose or Madaline agree to a clandestine marriage. The marriage took place, however, as we have just ascertained; and at the end of the week we quitted the château. The letters we found in the cottage and destroyed show that, for a short time after our return to England a correspondence was carried on between Frank and his wife. But, as you know, the first mutterings of the storm that was about to devastate Europe had already been heard; and not long afterwards it burst in all its fury. There could be no more communications now, public or private, between a husband in England and a wife in the valley of the Soane.

And if there had been, all would be a blank to me ; but that Father Jerome has enabled me to fill the void. Madame la Comtesse, it appears, was the sister of M. de Couvré—the poor old man whom we yesterday laid in his grave. It was regarded by the *haute noblesse* as somewhat of a *mésalliance* on the Count's part, because the lady's father had been a banker in Lyons—a business to which our poor friend succeeded at his death. But besides that the Count got with his wife a large dowry, she was eminently fitted to adorn any station ; and the marriage proved to be a happy one, though an only daughter was all the fruit of it. Well, when the peasants began everywhere to rise, and men's lives were considered unsafe in their country houses, the Count, though much beloved by his own people, thought it best to send the Countess and his daughter away. They went, under the escort of Father Jerome, to Lyons, where the spirit of loyalty was very strong, and where M. de Couvré was able to afford them

an asylum. I need not describe to you the fate of that devoted city. M. de la Fontaine, carrying with him a few faithful followers, threw himself into the place. Side by side with the noble De Precy, he fought every inch of ground,—having, however, ere the investment was completed, constrained his brother-in-law to quit the town with Madaline. As to the Countess, she refused to leave her husband, and Father Jerome abode with them. They both perished. Father Jerome made his escape.

“I do not know how M. de Couvré and his charge made their way to England. Father Jerome could give me no information on that head. All that I can collect from him is, that by the merest accident he encountered M. de Couvré soon after reaching London himself, and that they were then established in Mrs Todd’s lodgings, to which Brackenbury had introduced them. M. de Couvré must have brought considerable supplies with him, for they lived in comparative comfort a year

before poor Madaline was constrained to turn her talents to account and to go upon the stage. Upon the stage my brother saw her ; and the rest you know. He never told me of the discovery he had made till it was too late. I got from him a letter in the country, imploring me, for God's sake, to come to him at an address which he gave me in Tottenham Court Road. He received me at the outer door, took me into the little drawing-room, which you will remember, and, overwhelmed with remorse, told me just as much of the truth as served his own purpose. Dying as she was, when he led me into her chamber, she recognised and blessed me. Sumner, I retailed the whole story, as I then believed it, by letter to my dear wife, and she, God bless her ! has been more than a mother to Madaline. So stands the case. What must be our next move ? ”

“ There's no need now, Harris, for precipitation. We have the fullest proof in our own hands. It is for you to choose your course of

action. I will co-operate with you—that you may rely upon, be your course what it may.”

“You have anticipated my very wishes, Sumner. You always do. My poor brother has suffered enough. Let him live on, as long as his life may continue, without sustaining any fresh blow. We will take Madaline into our confidence, as indeed we have already done ; but for the present let us be content to make sure of evidence sufficient to carry us through the courts, if we must appeal to them, and there stop. Poor Charley ! My heart bleeds for him ; but right is right as between the son of the unfortunate person, Charley’s mother, and the daughter of the true Lady Belmore.”

The Doctor having approved of this plan of campaign, the two gentlemen proceeded to carry it into execution ; and in order to provide against accidents, however remote, they caused Father Jerome to make deposition upon oath before a magistrate as to the validity of his own signature, and the truth of the statement

contained in the certificate of marriage. That done, and the priest made easy in his circumstances, Mr and Mrs Harris proposed to return with Madaline into Devonshire. But one request she ventured to urge, and they could not refuse to comply with it. She was in possession of her mother's portrait, and other memorials of her mother living: she wished to kneel upon her mother's grave. She did so, Mr Harris alone bearing her company. It was in a quiet churchyard—quiet then, because still removed by two or three miles from the nearest of the suburbs. Rough and untidy God's Acre might be elsewhere, the taste for dealing otherwise than neglectfully with the dwellings of the dead not having as yet arisen among us; but the particular spot beside which these two persons knelt that day lacked nothing to show that the ground was sacred. An iron railing enclosed a tomb of white marble, carved on the summit into a raised cross; and on the slab which faced eastward was inscribed the single word "**Madaline.**"

The tears shed by both, as they kneeled beside the railing, were not bitter tears. She was at rest. "After life's fitful fever she slept well:" and not on any account whatever would either of them have broken in upon her repose. They thought of her as freed from all care, all sorrow, all sin. They equally prayed that in the land whither she was gone they might be with her in God's own time.

"Could not my poor uncle be laid here, too, papa? It would be sweet to think of them, so long separated in life, as in death re-united."

"It shall be done, my darling. In the excitement or confusion of the moment the idea never occurred to me. It shall be done before we leave town."

And done it was. A faculty was easily procured; and from its stern brick vault the coffin, containing all that had been mortal of M. de Couvré, was lifted. They conveyed it to the little churchyard, and in a grave close beside that of Madaline it found its abiding resting-place. There is no stone to mark where

it lies ; enough that it was placed so near to hers that whenever the shells decay their dust shall mingle.

The business of the Harris family in London was now complete. It comprised, among other arrangements, a substantial token to good Mrs Todd that her benevolence was not forgotten ; and sobered and grateful, in spite of their natural anxiety on Reginald's account, they took the road homewards. The nightingales were in full song, and spring in all its freshness, when they reached the valley of the Tamar.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### W A R.

WE return now to Baddlesmere, where time seemed to move upon leaden wings—one day resembling another without any other variety than might arise out of the shifting health of the invalid. The winter wore away, and the spring came, and the early summer began to make its influence felt without producing on Lord Belmore any visible change for the better. He was still speechless, still incapable of helping himself, and still dependent on those about him for the supply of every want. Irritability, however, which so often attends on paralysis, was not apparent in him. He would weep by the

hour without being able to communicate to others the cause of his grief ; but the expression of his countenance was always gentle, especially when expressing, as it very eloquently did, his gratitude for services rendered. He did not know that his son had been sent to Flanders. As he was able to read, they gave him his newspaper, from which he learned the return of Napoleon to Paris ; and in the preparations made on both sides to renew the war he evidently took much interest. But that Charley was in the field nobody told him ; and strange as it may appear, it seemed never to occur to himself to guess at the truth. On the contrary, he would make signs for his slate, on which he held what little conversation he was capable of with those about him, and occasionally wrote the words, "When does Charley return?" But Lady Belmore's answer, or that of any other of his attendants, that Charley would come by-and-by, always contented him. Indeed, he forgot to-day that he had asked the same question yesterday, and repeated it again to-morrow,

quite unconscious that the day before it had been answered.

Existence so entirely devoid of incident cannot be chronicled ; for Lady Belmore lived only to nurse her lord, never leaving him except to worship in church, and occasionally to seek out those among her pensioners who lay at a distance. All within reach of such progress as he could make she visited in his company—that is to say, she caused his chair to be wheeled beside her when the weather was genial and warm, and enticed him into taking interest in these her charitable missions. But a great change was impending, and it came in due time.

If there was the repose of death, or of a living death, at Baddlesmere, there were hurry and bustle enough everywhere else throughout the United Kingdom. Sudden orders went forth to man and equip fleets. Militiamen disbanded only a year ago were recalled to their standards ; and in town and country the recruiting-sergeant was busy. How keenly

our statesmen regretted then that the flower of the army had been sent to America to wage a war, profitless, teasing, and in its issues necessarily inglorious, because carried on by dribblets! It is true that so early as December 1814 the preliminaries of peace between the two nations had been signed, and that all the blood shed subsequently to that act was shed in vain. But steam navigation was then unknown except on American rivers, and the fastest of sailing frigates failed to reach either Canada or the United States in time to bring back to the Duke's support some of the best of the regiments which had followed him from Lisbon to Toulouse. Every available man, therefore, was shipped off from England and Ireland as fast as circumstances would allow; and early in June, when all was done, a very motley band—in point of numbers inconsiderable, in the matter of discipline scarce in many instances half formed—stood out as the nucleus and backbone of the force which might be called upon any day to mea-

sure its strength with the best army ever raised by France, having Napoleon himself at its head.

April and May wore themselves out. June came in, bringing with it rumours from abroad more or less sinister. All these Lord Belmore read of day by day in the newspapers, and they interested him greatly. By-and-by there was a pause, which extended from about the 14th to the 20th, and then news of a terrible battle—when fought, however, or how ending, nobody knew—agitated the public mind. The Duke had been defeated—the French were in full march upon Brussels. So spoke the voice of rumour, sending dismay into the hearts of millions, and causing the Funds to drop. Lord Cochrane, it was alleged, had arrived with this terrible report, and of its correctness no doubts could be entertained. A few hours more, and another story rang through the land. The Duke had won a glorious victory. The enemy were entirely defeated. Buonaparte, as people began again to call him, was fleeing for

his life, and hopes were entertained of overtaking and destroying him. The bells rang, and the guns fired, to testify to the credibility of these statements. How did they affect individuals ?

It was the morning of the 23d, and the postman's bag at Baddlesmere being opened, a letter was handed to Lady Belmore, not in Charley's writing ; while the newspaper, as usual, was laid hold of by my lord. Charley had been pretty constant in his correspondence since he went abroad. He wrote for the most part in low spirits, and the burden of his story varied little ; but latterly he appeared to be more cheerful. About a week before the day of which we are speaking, he had written to say that there was the prospect of some fighting soon, and that the thought of it was rapture to him. A short note, dated on the 15th at midnight, ran thus :—

“ I've been to the Duchess's ball. The trumpets are sounding to boot and saddle. I

have only time to say, God bless you, mother ! Don't forget me."

The letter which the butler handed to her ladyship now was not in Charley's writing. How her heart beat ! how her pulses stopped ! how conscious she was of becoming very faint ! She would not allow her lord to notice this, so she rose and quitted the room. She betook herself to her own boudoir and sat down, unable either to avert her eyes from the strange letter, or to break the seal. Good God ! what sound is that below. Something has fallen. She started up, and leaving the letter still unread, the seal still unbroken, on her table, rushed downstairs. Prone on the floor of the breakfast-room Lord Belmore was lying, with a newspaper spread open near him. His servants, Bruce and Ford, were both beside him, having, like her ladyship, been attracted by the sound ; but they had not raised him.

" Lift his lordship up, Bruce—tenderly, tenderly," cried my lady, hurrying to the spot.

They did lift him up tenderly. The eye was fixed ; the jaw had fallen—he was stone-dead. He had died as suddenly as his son died, though the one fell from what is usually called a stroke of nature, the other by a bullet passing through the brain.

What cared Lady Belmore now about the contents of the unread letter ? What were words of sympathy and consolation to her, by whomsoever spoken, by whomsoever written ? There lay her lord—the object of her heart's earthly worship—stark and stiff before her ; and in the list of the killed at that great battle, which gave peace to Europe for forty years, the name of her son was inscribed. Fate itself could work her no more evil now. The sun of her life was set for ever.

The letter—which she never found courage to read, which passed out of her hand with the seal unbroken, and was not taken up again—was from Reginald. It told a tale similar in many respects to that which another letter told to the inmates of the Rectory, though



mixed up even more than this latter was with expressions of regard and regret for the fallen hero. It described, in brief, that portion of the great fight in which the writer was himself personally engaged ; and then proceeded to show how, when the English line advanced, Charley's regiment swept past the Rifles, Charley cheering his men and waving his sword, and shouting to his cousin a word of recognition. Presently a French square was charged, and through it the British horsemen went, rallying on the other side, and charging back again. I don't know how it came about," Reginald proceeded to say, "but I never lost sight of Charley all this while. The square was broken. I saw him in the midst of the fugitives slashing right and left. Presently he fell, and his horse rushing back, was stopped by one of my men. I have kept the animal, which poor Lady Belmore will doubtless be glad to receive. Alas, alas ! her son she will never see more ! A musket-ball had passed clean through his

head. He must have died without a moment's suffering.

"And now, dearest mother, a word about myself. You will see my name in the list of the wounded. I am not much hurt, otherwise I could not have written this long letter. But a ball through the fleshy part of my left arm will entitle me to leave; and I hope to be among you not many days after this shall reach you, please God."

Our history is drawing to a close—as much of it, at least, as would in the repetition command the interest of the general reader. In spite of Reginald's assurances of the trifling nature of his wound, there was, as may be believed, intense anxiety at St Botolph's, till a second communication, dated Brussels, gave notice that he was so far on his way home. Why describe either the journey or its termination? How pretend to paint the aching hope, the yearning desire, the absolute agony of the fulfilment, when the gallant soldier alighted at the Rectory gate, and took father,

mother, and Madaline, one after another, into his embrace? Yes, he looked very pale; and the jolting of the coach had tried his endurance. But he was at home—in the midst of all whom he most loved on earth—caressed, wept over, almost worshipped. What cares a man for wounds and sufferings past if they be so compensated?

The deaths of Lord Belmore and poor Charley, melancholy as to the outer world they seemed to be, were felt by Mr Harris, and all conversant with Madaline's history, to be little short of providential. There could be no necessity now to rip up old sores. Nothing could be gained by making public events which redounded so little to the honour of the name. It would be cruel to rob the unfortunate Lady Belmore of the last shred of self-respect which still adhered to her. She had lived as Lord Belmore's lawful wife more than a quarter of a century. It would be inhuman to turn her out at the end of that space of time—no earthly object being gained by it—without a

name, without a character, upon the world. No. Madaline herself shrank from thus visiting the sins of the husband upon the wife; and Madaline was right. Lord Belmore did not know when he linked his fate with that of the woman, who became the mother of his sons, that his legitimate wife lived. He had heard nothing from her or of her for three years, except that Count de la Fontaine and all his family were said to have perished in the massacre that ensued upon the fall of Lyons. When he saw her again sons were born to him; and to have claimed her before the world, as doubtless he ought to have done, would have been not alone to bastardise them, but to expose himself to be branded as a bigamist. Yet, to live without her was impossible; and hence that wretched compromise, that miserable deceit, which issued in carrying her off to the cottage in Tottenham, only that she might die there. So also his systematic ignoring of the existence of the child which she bore to him, however, in itself,

worthy of all condemnation, could yet be accounted for. How was it possible for him to notice Madaline in any way without acknowledging her to be his daughter? How treat her otherwise than as a natural child, except at the expense of rendering both his other children illegitimate? And how do her and her mother's memory the bitter wrong of treating her as a bastard? No; he could not take her up. He could not acknowledge her. He could not even see, or so much as keep her in his remembrance. And here, in extenuation of Mr Brackenbury's conduct, it seems only fair to state that, knowing the situation of his patron's affairs, he concealed from him the fact that Madaline was in London; and that never, till that conference took place at Baddlesmere, with which our readers are familiar, was the truth communicated to him that Lord Belmore had discovered and stolen her from her uncle. On the whole, then, the deaths of Lord Belmore and Charley were felt to be—both to them and to those who survived them—a judgment, tempered by

exceeding mercy. There was no need now to publish abroad the details of Madaline's parentage. It was enough to say, as they said everywhere, that she was the grandchild of a brave French royalist, and that Mr and Mrs Harris having reared her as a child of their own, were now about to make her such in law by making her the wife of their son.

Mr Harris, as a matter of course, succeeded his brother in the family title and estates. He removed with Lady Belmore to Belmore House, which became again the centre of a liberal hospitality, though somewhat differently dispensed than in the late lord's day. The summer and autumn were chiefly spent at Baddlesmere, the Dowager Lady Belmore removing to a residence in another county wherein the widows of the lords of Belmore were accustomed to find a home. There she found what she had long been in search of, a clergyman of the Church of England, from whose ministrations she derived the greatest possible comfort. Possibly in those days he might have been spoken

of as an Evangelical or Methodist. Now, when men better understand what the true principles of the Church of England are, he would take his place among moderate churchmen. Be that as it may, he taught her to look in humility and faith to the one Power which is capable of binding up the broken heart, and to find all that her soul yearned after in the Church's ministrations. She had been tried in the fire and came out purified.

Reginald sold out. As soon as his health was completely re-established he led Madaline to the altar ; and it gives us great pleasure to be able to add that between them they have contrived to make it in the highest degree improbable that the name of Harris will, for many generations, become extinct.

Of the faithful among the old servants of the house—of Bruce, Ford, Mrs Jones, and others—every care was taken. As long as they desired to remain in active service they were retained, and when years and infirmities grew upon them, then they were pensioned off.

Bruce, in particular, received, as he deserved, the respect, as well as the esteem, of the whole household ; and in a neat cottage outside the park, which was assigned to him rent-free, he ended his days. Lord and Lady Claud Tremanere were as much with her relatives as his active and successful career in politics would allow. The beautiful Lady Alice married Colonel Protheroe after all, and made, we have reason to believe, a very good wife to him. As to the other characters that fretted their hour upon our stage, a mist enshrouds them altogether. But of the discovery effected by Sydney Lord Belmore it is necessary that notice should be taken. Long years after his brother's death he happened by accident to touch a secret spring in an escritoire which stood in what used to be the late lord's private study. A drawer flew open, and in it was found another miniature of Madaline's mother, painted evidently after she had fled with her husband to Tottenham. It was the portrait of a woman matured yet beautiful, no longer a child, nor bearing the



trace of childhood about her, but perfect in its loveliness. Poor man! many a bitter tear the deceased lord had shed over it when none were there to see; many an agonising address he made to it when no ear was there to hear. Sydney Lord Belmore wisely kept that discovery to himself. The portrait which came to them through M. de Couvré's means was public property. This Lord Belmore restored to the secret drawer, where, for aught we know to the contrary, it still lies.

THE END.







